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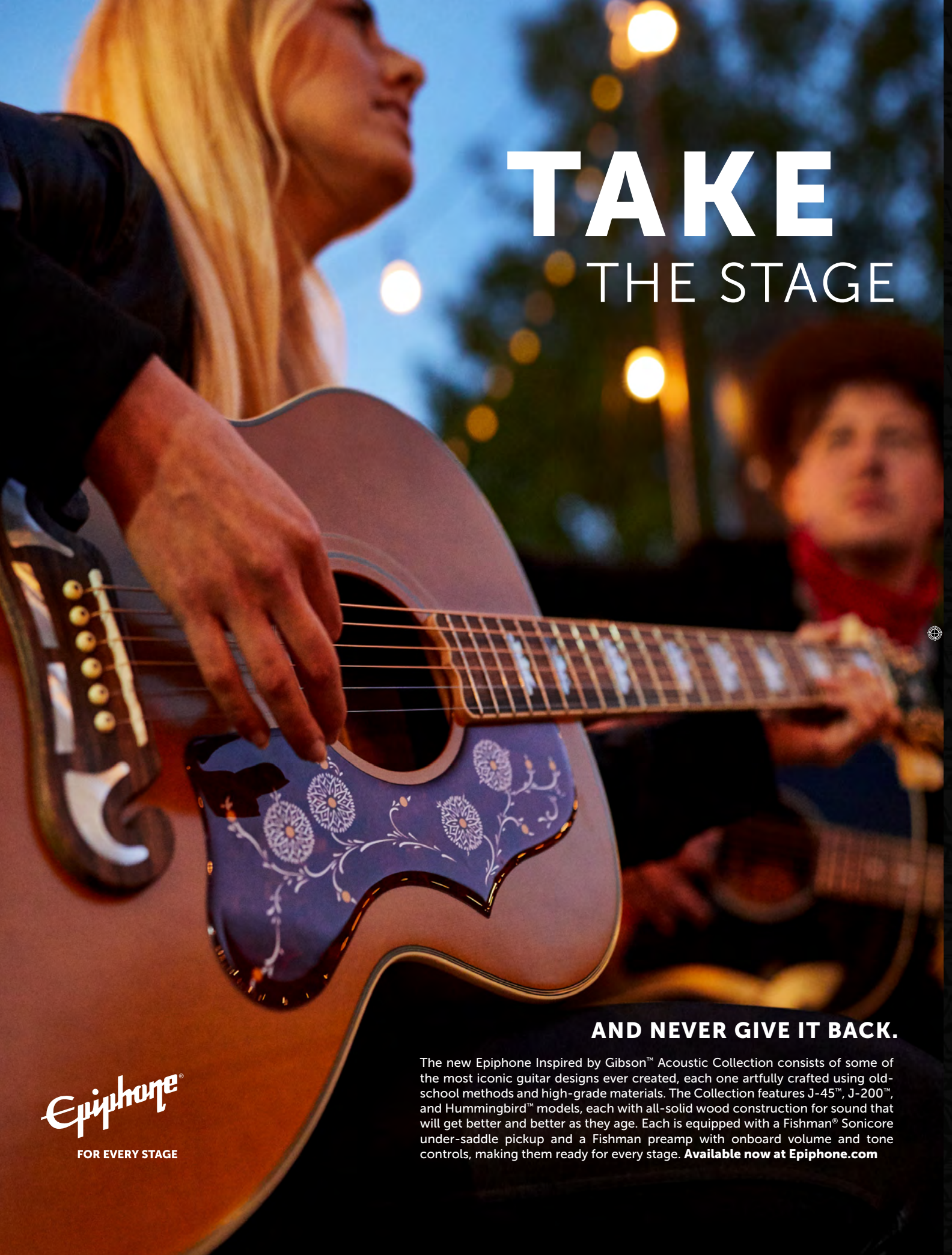
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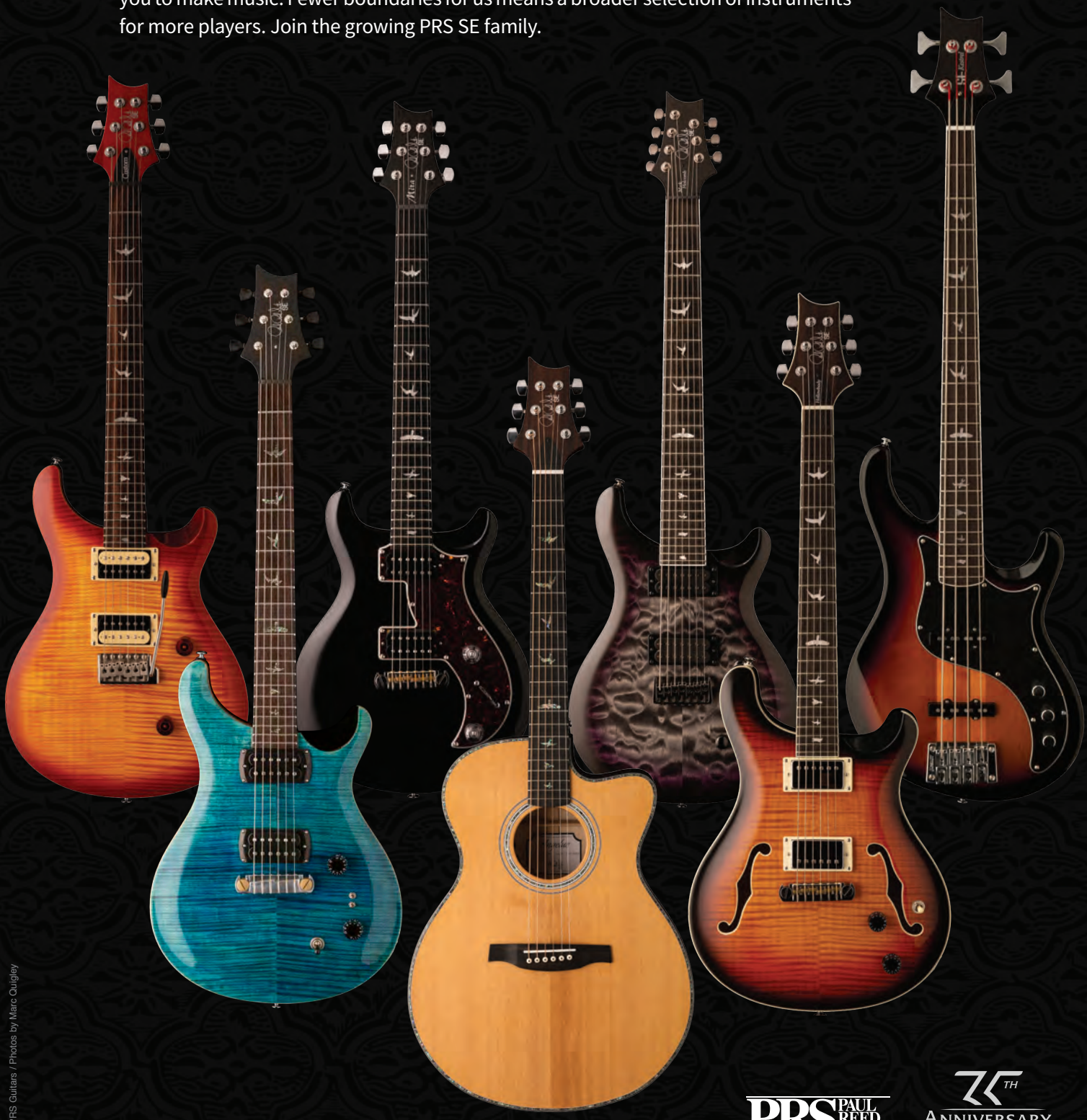

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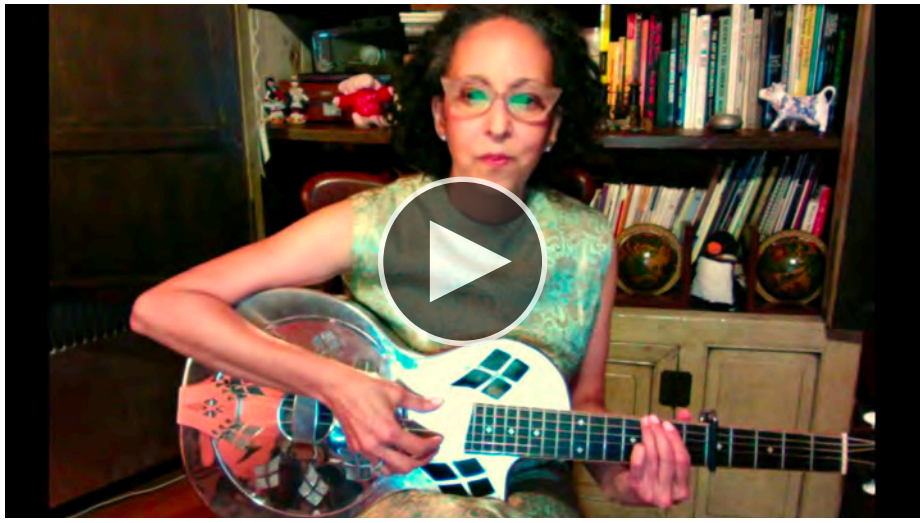

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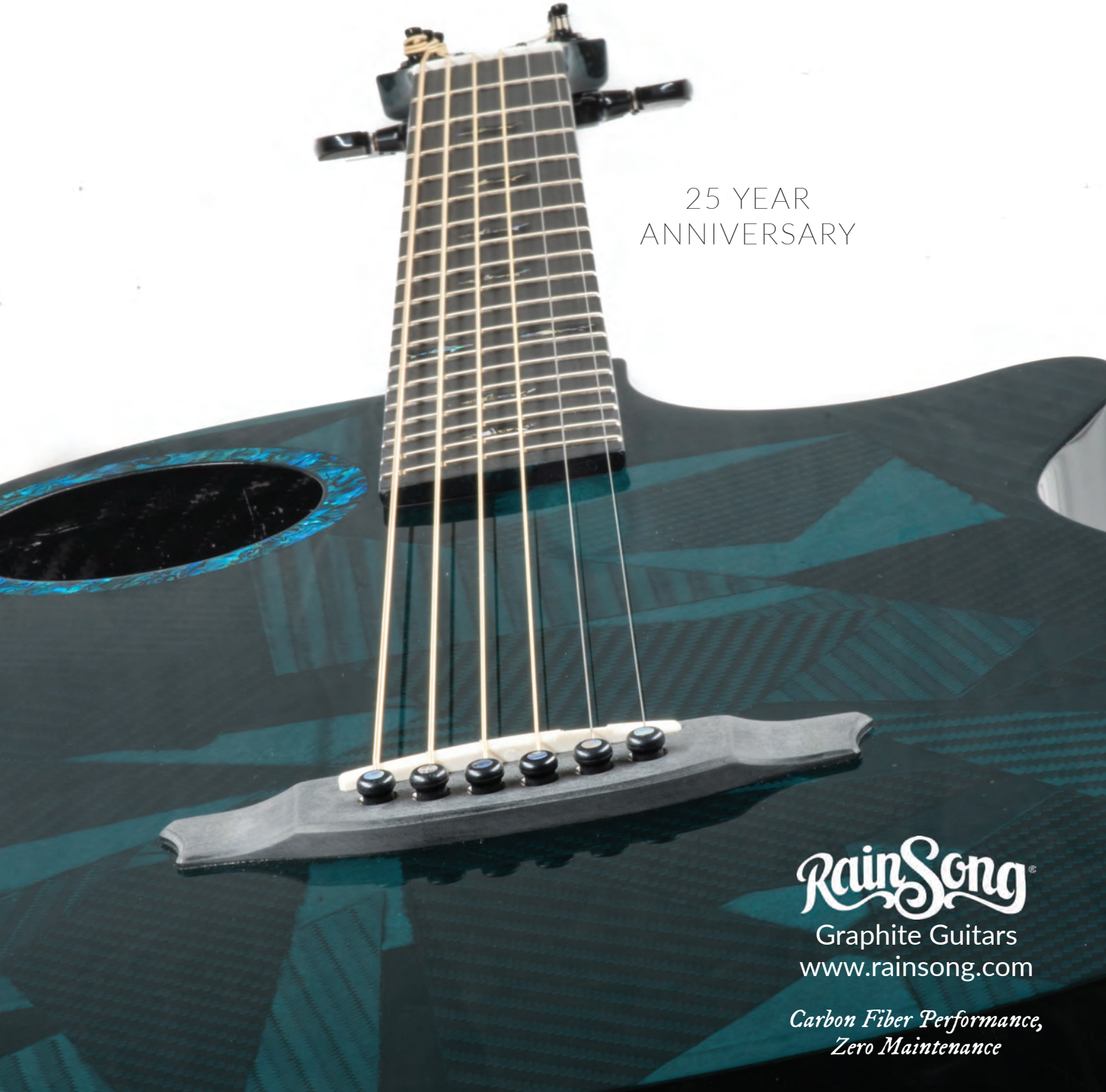

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THE FRONT PORCH

Jerry Jeff Walker

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When most people think of blues guitar, they default to the men generally regarded as the music's architects—pre-World War II players like Charley Patton, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Robert Johnson, and others. But ever since the vaudevillian Mamie Smith made the first recorded blues song, "Crazy Blues," in 1920, women have played a significant role in the development of the genre—and by extension, American popular music in general.

While the accomplishments of blues guitarists like Elizabeth Cotten and Memphis Minnie are well celebrated, the same cannot be said of many of their counterparts. So in this issue's cover story, writer and educator Valerie Turner—herself a formidable Piedmont-style player—reflects on the legacies of Geeshie Wiley, Flora Molton, Etta Baker, Algia Mae Hinton, and Precious Bryant, all of whom spent much of their musical lives toiling in obscurity before receiving any kind of recognition at all.

Not long before the editorial team hashed out the contents of this issue, we were saddened to learn of the passing of two beloved musicians from entirely different backgrounds: Jerry Jeff Walker, the outlaw country singer-songwriter, and Eddie Van Halen, the electric guitar hero. It was surprising to see that *AG* had never run the notation for Walker's most popular song, 1968's "Mr. Bojangles," and we have finally corrected this omission in the Acoustic Classic department.

On the other hand, Van Halen might seem like an unlikely subject for a lesson in an acoustic guitar magazine, but in the midst of so much high-octane rock, his band's catalog includes some revelatory moments on both steel- and nylon-strings—passages that highlight his rhythmic verve and impossible technique. Even if you're not a fan, be sure to check out the lesson and accompanying video (available at AcousticGuitar.com), in which guitar wizard and educator Chris Buono goes deep into each example.

As a side note for you gear heads, it happens that there's plenty of information about Van Halen's electric rigs, but next to none about his acoustic guitars. However, in a publicity shot from the short-lived 1990s television sitcom *Café Americain*, Van Halen is seen with a custom Collings OM2. (Do a YouTube search and you can find a scene with him playing that guitar.) Curious to know more, I reached out to Collings and learned that Van Halen had felt compelled to pick up the instrument after visiting the factory.

In any case, just as we were putting the finishing touches on this issue, in late December, the guitar community experienced yet another major loss with the passing of Tony Rice. We'll be sure to properly honor Rice—a towering giant, to whom all modern flatpickers are indebted—in the next issue.

—Adam Perlmutter
Adam.Perlmutter@Stringletter.com

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ADVENTURE TIME

Thank you for running a story on one of the jazz greats who brought classical guitar to jazz. Gene Bertoncini is a true gem and pioneer of the jazz/classical guitar, a great performer, a great teacher/educator, and an all-around wonderful man who has contributed so much to the world of music. I have studied with Gene and know him as a friend who also plays a mean round of Adventure Golf. Thank you so much; I hope all the readers explore what he has given us, a true gift.

—Richard Williams, via email

BRIGHTER DAYS

I'm taking this moment to thank you for the January/February 2021 issue, which brightened up my days mainly due to its noticeable increased coverage of nylon-string acoustic. I've been reading *AG* since 2012 (having chanced upon it in an English bookstore in Paris, France, a year after developing an interest in learning to play the guitar) and am happy that you've maintained production despite the prevailing global economic, technological, social, and political circumstances.

While it seems a great number of acoustic guitar players prefer steel-string variants, I'm pleased to know that there is a body of players out there who appreciate the nylon-string approach to their work, be it in classical, world, folk, blues, or jazz. Thanks for revealing the craft of Lianne La Havas, Andrew York, and Gene Bertoncini. In this regard, I'd really love to read articles covering some of my favorite contemporary guitarists like Earl Klugh, Peter White, Jonathan Butler, and the late Zimbabwean Oliver Mtukudzi.

—Philip Odida, Fort Lee, NJ

THANKS FOR THE (BAHAMIAN) MEMORIES

I enjoyed Nick Millevoi's piece on Joseph Spence in the November/December 2020 issue. It was my privilege to speak at small Bahamian churches throughout the Family Islands from 1975 to 2000. As a struggling guitarist (still am!), I was fascinated by the older musicians who, obviously lacking any level of formal training, were producing the most intricate and intriguing music on ancient, cheap guitars! Years later I stumbled upon *Joseph Spence: The Complete Folkways Recordings 1958* and heard again tunes being played whose complexity stand even with Mississippi John Hurt's! Wonderful memories, and Millevoi's contribution brought them all back. Thank you!

—Stan Farmer, Milbridge, ME

IT'S ABOUT TIME

Hey y'all, hope all is well. I followed a link from a recent *AG* newsletter, and much to my surprise, there was Jontavious Willis, and other blues-based guys who looked like me. I've been saying to my wife for years how under-represented Black people are in the acoustic guitar world. I mean, I'm thinking we had a *lot* to do with the advancement of music in general, and it's about time to get involved in the selling of guitars, magazines, and music-related gear. Keep it up for sure!

—Bobby Benson, via email

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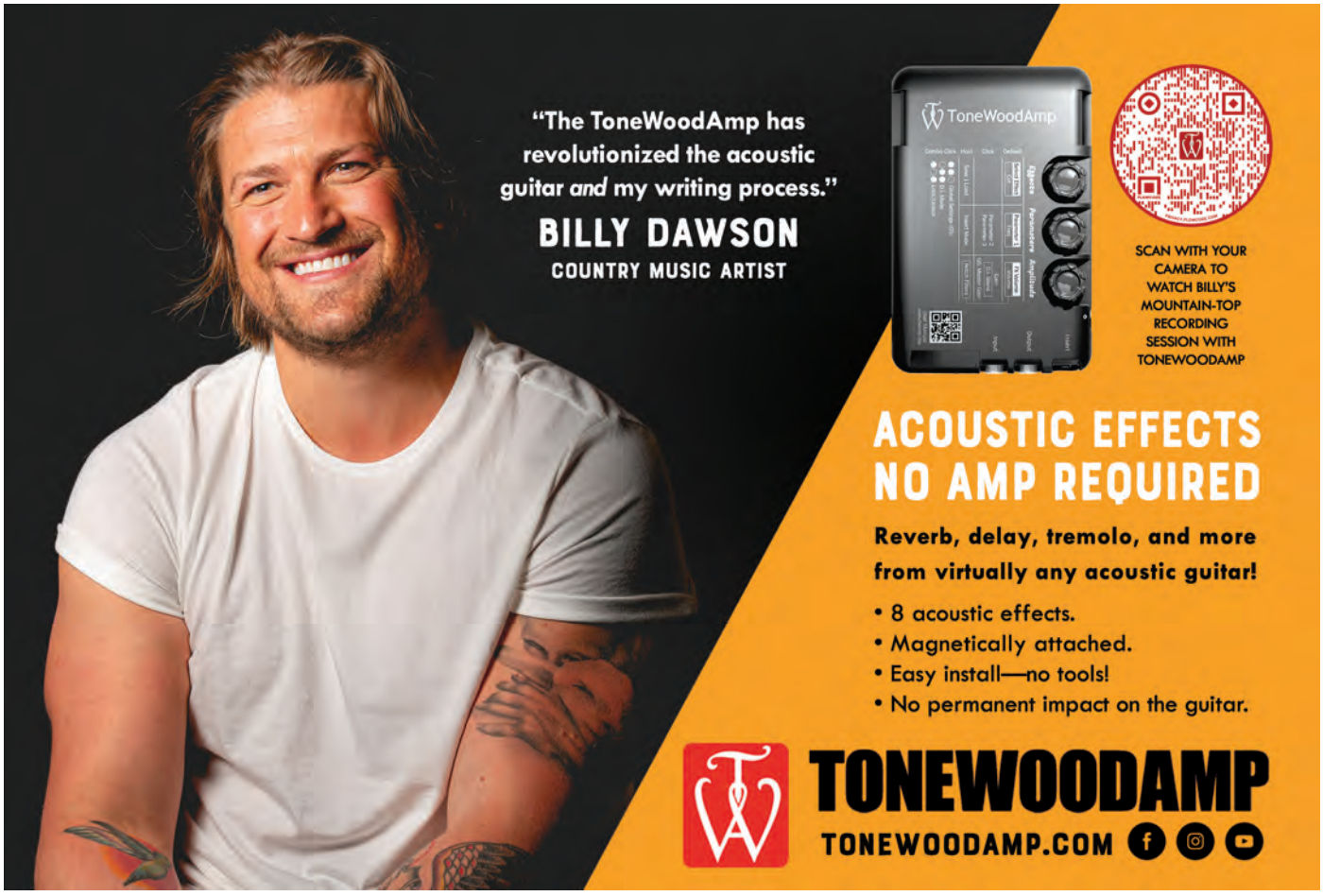


Modern English

Connecting with leading UK fingerstylist and educator Tristan Seume

BY JULIE BERGMAN

Tristan Seume

JOHN BREESE FILMS

Tristan Seume has made his way into the top tier of acoustic guitar instrumentalists in the United Kingdom not only due to the extraordinary fingerstyle abilities demonstrated on his original and interpretative recordings, but also his penchant for sharing his skills. In addition to being in high demand to play on other musicians' projects, he is one of the top educators in his field. Seume, who is in his early 40s, is a regular contributor to several UK music magazines and a workshop teacher at major guitar festivals. His concise video tutorials are now making their way into American guitarists' feeds.

During the pandemic last spring, I Skyped with Seume, a resident of Surrey, about 30 minutes from London. We discussed his affinity for '80s music, his main nonstandard tuning, and his prized battery of Fylde instruments, among other things.

How did you get your start in music?

My dad had a guitar and played in college for fun. I remember him buying a guitar at a yard sale. The family was just then moving to a new house and this guitar was literally the last thing to get in the van. I picked it up in boredom. My parents thought I took to it quite naturally, and I was just obsessed by the time I was around 12 or 13. I was starting secondary school, and there were a couple of kids in school who had guitars and I was quite competitive. It was the catalyst for my obsession. I wanted to be the best in my class and school.

Where did you grow up and go to school?

I grew up in Guildford, a half hour from London. I went to college down in Devon, in the West Country, to Dartington College of Arts. It's a well-known school for arts, but also my primary passion is nature and the outdoors, and it was a chance to spend time in nature there. The guitar was a ruse so I could be outside and take notes on the birds and animals around where I was studying.

When I was 21, there was a music college in Guildford that was just starting up, the Academy of Contemporary Music. The college took me on as a junior teacher. That was again fortuitous timing. I started teaching there and it led to other things. The college recommended me to Bath Guitar Festival, which is a well-known guitar summer camp, when they needed an extra tutor, and I started doing some journalism for *Guitarist* magazine, including features on techniques.

Were you playing both electric and acoustic guitar at that point?

Yes, but all the while I was increasingly interested in the acoustic guitar. I went to college as an electric guitar player thinking I'd play in bands, but I began writing instrumental music on acoustic. I was also introduced to Gordon Giltrap, who is a source of inspiration. I was brought up on folk music. It was a natural thing. Gordon later became my mentor, which gave me great confidence just as I was starting out as a pro player.

What kind of gigs were you playing?

I'd been playing for [English folk singer and fiddler] Jackie Oates in her band for about ten years. She'd moved onto other projects, and I found myself without a regular gig, so it started me off on writing and arranging more for guitar. I've always loved some of the great songs from the '80s, so I started off with a Heart song sung by Nancy Wilson, "These Dreams," the lyrics of which were written by Elton John's lyricist, Bernie Taupin. People really liked my interpretation, and it was shared with Nancy, who emailed me that she loved it. I was a little bit starstruck by that.

When you were studying guitar, did you learn to read music?

I studied classical for a little while in secondary school, so I learned to read music. It started me off with some fingerstyle discipline, even though my classical teacher would have a heart attack if he saw my right-hand technique now. Being able to read is quite an advantage for scoring. I find it really useful for speeding up the arranging process. I don't fluently read a classical score, but I write in notation first to be able to interpret rhythms and counterpoint in particular. Then I'll convert it to tab to work out the most logical fingering.

What tunings do you work with?

I am primarily using C G D G C D. The bottom three strings are in fifths rather than fourths. Like the bottom three strings of a cello, it allows you to play nice wide-open triad voicings much more easily than in standard tuning. For what I'm hearing in my head, I like to have open-spaced chord voicings. And it's really useful for playing with backing singers. It's a

modal DADGAD type sound, and with the top two strings you can get some nice ornaments that can work really well. You can get a bit lost in open tunings, but I decided to rearrange everything I played in one tuning and be able to learn one tuning inside out rather than flying blind. I'm quite comfortable in a number of keys, because the top five strings are the same as sawmill banjo tuning, so I call it C-saw—sawmill over a C bass. Martin Simpson occasionally used it, and I think Nic Jones might have used it. It tends to have mileage if I'm teaching a class, as it's usually new to folks.

What guitars are you using and what strings for the C-saw tuning?

I've used Fylde guitars for quite a few years now, since meeting their maker, Roger Bucknall [see profile in the January/February 2020 issue], at Ullapool Guitar Festival in Scotland. I've played hundreds of guitars over the years doing clinics and demos, but nothing better than a Fylde—the level of craftsmanship is breathtaking, but never clinically so. There's always the sense that they're built by human hands. Roger made me a customized Goodfellow last year. It's a beautiful small-bodied fan-fret with a Brazilian rosewood body and a cedar top. It's probably the last guitar I'll ever own—it's perfect. I use Elixir .012–.056 phosphor bronze Nanowebs, which sound really rich on that guitar. The combination is almost cello-like in warmth and depth. I also have another Fylde custom Goodfellow with a Cuban mahogany body and an Engelmann spruce top, a Fylde Falstaff, a five-string banjo, a bouzouki, and a banjola, all made by Roger.

What's your favorite environment for teaching?

Clinics. I wouldn't do them if I didn't love them. I've taught at colleges, but you're generally working to someone else's syllabus. If I'm teaching a workshop, it's nice to present what I think and believe. There are a number of events I do regularly in a year as a clinic teacher now. It also helped me gain confidence to be on stage gigging.

What are your plans going forward?

I'm back in the studio. I've got two solo albums out, and I've been working on a third for a little while now. It's predominantly traditional music and a few original compositions in that vein. I keep getting obsessed with side projects, like music of the '80s, but my plan is by the end of the year to have a new album out and get this '80s project tied up into an album as well.

People are so nostalgic for some of that music from the '80s now. When I grew up everyone was going on about '60s music, but there were some great songs in the '80s. Some were overdressed, but they translate well into acoustic instrumentals.

How have you been managing during the pandemic?

Obviously, it really put the brakes on everything—the creative sector being no different. Just like everyone else, all my gigs were zapped in one hit, which was pretty hard to take. During the early stages of lockdown I did a couple of livestream gigs, but I used the opportunity to raise some money for charity and also help out a few friends. My first Facebook Live raised £500 [around $670] for Help Musicians, a charity that supports musicians in crisis in the UK—pretty apt right now! And shortly afterwards, I organized a livestream with five other guitarist friends of mine—Clive Carroll, Tim Edey, Will McNicol, Söenke Meinen, and Jule Malischke. We all just shared the event with our collective fan bases and raised what seemed like a small fortune at a time when none of us knew how we'd make the rent that month! AG

In a rare photo with an acoustic guitar (Collings OM2), Eddie Van Halen poses with Valerie Bertinelli on the set of *Café Americain*, 1994

WARNER BROS.

little guitars, BIG IDEAS

Exploring electric guitar icon Eddie Van Halen's unplugged side

BY CHRIS BUONO

In a career spanning more than four decades, Eddie Van Halen made an indelible mark on the guitar world. Van Halen, who succumbed to cancer in October 2020 at age 65, was the quintessential guitar hero, not to mention a skilled songwriter, arranger, engineer, and producer. He gave us music that was loved all over the world and which will continue to inspire rock musicians and listeners alike for generations to come.

With his striped "Frankenstein" guitars and his elusive "brown sound," Van Halen is celebrated as a purveyor of all things electric guitar. But the truth is he was a nimble and inspired multi-instrumentalist. As early as his namesake band's third album, *Women and Children First* (1980), Van Halen was recording parts with assorted keyboards. In fact, it was the mega-hit "Jump" from *1984*, built around a riff played on an Oberheim OB-Xa synthesizer, that solidified Van Halen as a household name.

Van Halen also applied his virtuosity, inventiveness, and rhythmic swagger to the acoustic guitar throughout his recorded output. In this lesson we'll look at selections spanning nearly the entire Van Halen catalog, ranging from 1979's *Van Halen II* through the group's 1995 release, *Balance*. From the deep swing in "Take Your Whiskey Home" to scorching solo pieces like the flamenco-influenced "Little Guitars (Intro)" to the touching tribute to his son Wolfgang, "316," you'll find unplugged Van Halen has plenty of gold to uncover, too.

TRIADIC MADNESS

Throughout the gaggle of songs Van Halen composed for his band, there's a hefty dose of bright progressions consisting of major and sus4 chords. One application that never failed Van Halen was playing triads on three adjacent strings. That approach translates well on acoustic, as evidenced throughout "Take Me Back (Deja Vu)," from *Balance*. Check out **Example 1**, patterned after the song's intro, in which a I–V–♭VII–IV (D–A–C–G) progression in D major unfolds on

the top three strings against the ringing open D. Make an effort to avoid playing the fifth and sixth strings as you use a 16th-note strumming motion. At the same time, apply a medium attack with only a slight accent on the chords that fall on the downbeat of one and the upbeat of two.

Bolstering these triads with five- and six-note voicings, more open strings, and strategically placed palm-muted root notes on the backbeat, **Example 2** illustrates the concepts behind the intro to the pop hit "Can't Stop Lovin' You," also from *Balance*. With open strings surrounding the fretted notes, it's important to arch your fretting fingers such that the notes ring uninterrupted. Also, be mindful of the rests on the upbeat of beat one and the palm mutes on beat two of each bar.

A triadic approach also plays a big role on a solo acoustic piece from *For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge* (1991) called "316," the title of which commemorates the birthdate of Van Halen's son Wolfgang. As seen in **Example 3**, the piece is played in the key of A major and resides in 6/8 time. Van Halen does it fingerstyle; I suggest assigning your thumb to strings 6 and 5, index to string 4, middle to string 3, and ring to string 2. Be sure to let the arpeggios ring throughout and dig the bluesy bend in the final bar—the sort of choice embellishment Van Halen would use off-the-cuff in front of screaming fans in packed stadiums.

There are many exciting facets to Van Halen's playing: techniques such as tapping, tremolo picking, harmonics, divebombs, and pick scrapes. Something often overlooked is his greatest attribute—his killer swing feel, on overdrive on "Take Your Whiskey Home," from *Women and Children First* (1980). **Example 4** exemplifies this rhythmic approach as it flows in a 16th-note swing referred to in the rock-guitar vernacular as "swunk." A palm-muted root note at each bar's downbeat establishes a dynamic starting point, and assorted dyads and triads provide a dynamic contrast. Use a harder pick attack, and release your fretting pressure soon after each strum, for added tightness.

TAPPING INTO IT

For better or worse, Van Halen's signature technique was two-handed tapping. Along with his fretting fingers, he used a pick-hand finger to hammer-on and pull-off notes on the fretboard. Both hands combined to play blistering legato sequences and runs, many of which were arpeggio-based and otherwise impossible to play. He also developed a variation on tapping that produced brilliant-sounding harmonics: By lightly tapping on strings dead center to the frets, he produced bright overtones.

CARL LENDER

Something often overlooked is his greatest attribute—his killer swing feel.

Always the showman, he didn't hesitate to apply his inventive electric guitar techniques to his acoustic playing.

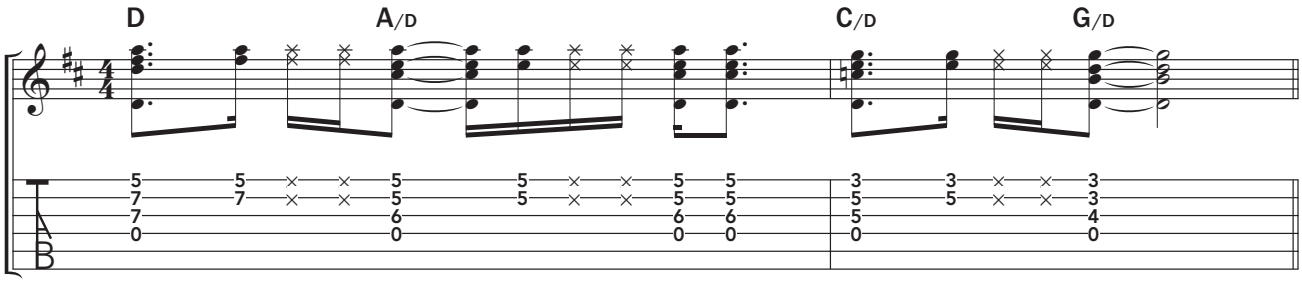
Following the trailblazing "Eruption" (*Van Halen*, 1978)—an unaccompanied electric guitar solo with a game-changing tapping cadenza—Van Halen applied the same approach on *Van Halen II* (1979) with "Spanish Fly," but on a nylon-string acoustic. **Example 5** is inspired by the intro, in which Van Halen put his harmonic tapping to good use. In bar 1, hold down an open-position Esus4 chord and lightly tap 12 frets above each open or fretted note—compare the required action and touch sensitivity to satisfyingly tapping the Return key after you finish typing a long message. Continue the same approach in bar 2, this time tapping the notes in an open Asus2 shape. Throughout the two bars, remember to make an effort to arch your fretting fingers so that all of the notes and harmonics ring as long as possible.

Patterned after the legato tapping in "Spanish Fly," **Example 6** sets your fretting hand in the fifth position. The tapping action takes place at the 12th and 14th frets, all while bringing to the fold another rhythmic signature, the use of quintuplets (five evenly spaced notes per beat). If you need a device to help you count the five subdivisions, just try saying or thinking "hip-po-pot-a-mus" on each beat.

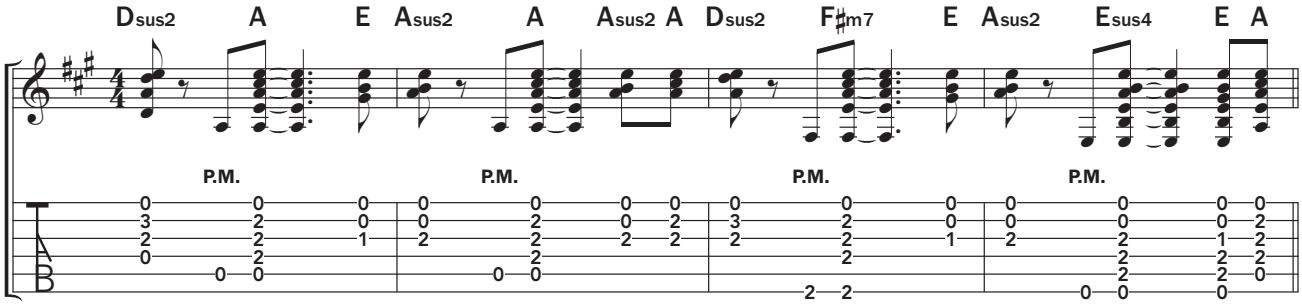
Start the first beat of bar 1 by pre-fretting the seventh-fret D and fifth-fret C (both on string 3) with your third and first fingers, respectively. Then, using your pick hand's index (or middle) finger, tap down on the 12th-fret G on that same string. The tapped note should feel like a hammer-on if you're doing it correctly. Immediately after that, flick your tapping finger up towards the ceiling, pulling off to the D below. (You could alternatively push your tapping finger down in pulling off to the D, but you'd sound less like Van Halen.) You'll then pull off to the C, followed by the open G string and then a hammer-on back to the D. Repeat the sequence for the rest of bar 1, and transfer it to the D string in bar 2.

Also, notice the last note of bars 1 and 2, where you have a "hammer-on from nowhere,"

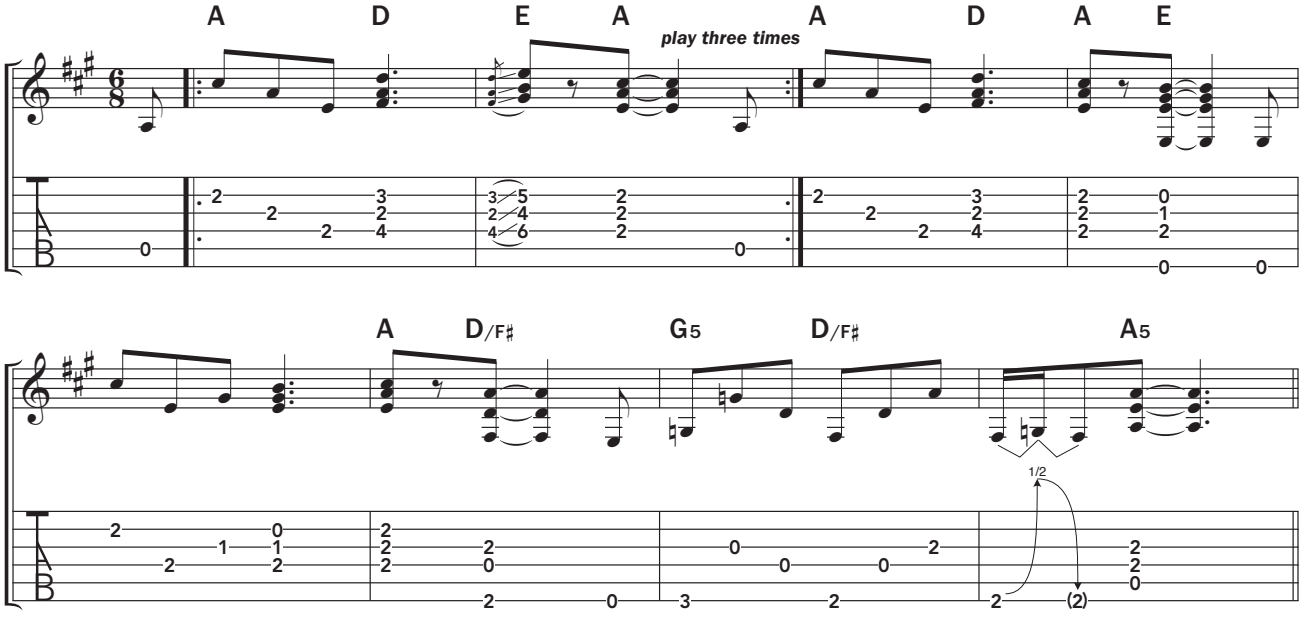
Example 1 (à la "Take Me Back (Deja Vu)")



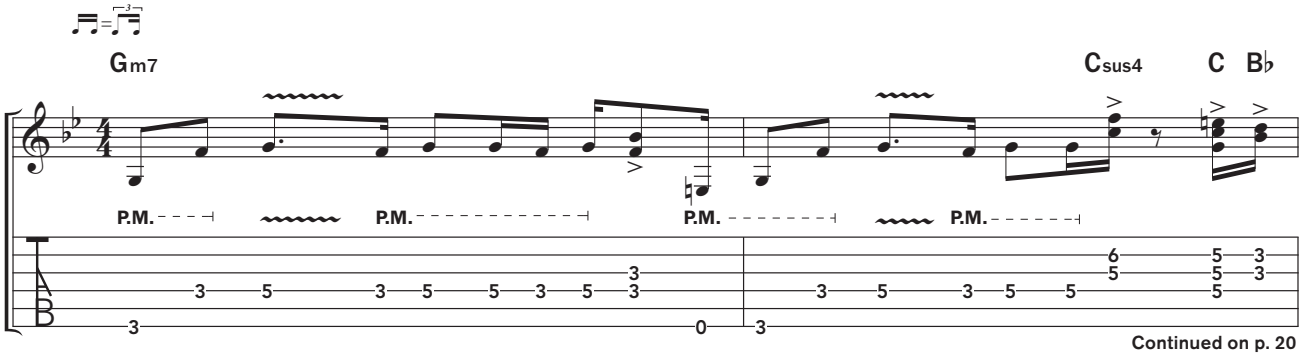
Example 2 (à la "Can't Stop Lovin' You")



Example 3 (à la "316")



Example 4 (à la "Take Your Whiskey Home")



Continued on p. 20

articulated by the fretting hand's first finger on the lower adjacent string. This is essential to Van Halen's economy of motion and overall fluidity.

FLAMENCO SKETCHES

"Little Guitars (Intro)," a solo piece from *Diver Down* (1982), is perhaps the most adventurous of Van Halen's acoustic guitar episodes. While watching the flamenco pioneer Carlos Montoya one night on TV, Van Halen was inspired to compose a short instrumental. Not having studied the music formally, he didn't have the requisite right-hand technique, so he came up with a workaround, using a thin pick to produce flamenco-like effects.

Example 7 takes its cue from the opening of "Little Guitars (Intro)." Each measure kicks off with a pronounced downward strum, followed by a simple arpeggiated pattern. All chords throughout incorporate open strings, most of the time surrounding nested fretted notes. The ornamental melody played with harmonics in bar 2 is signature Van Halen. Given the nylon strings, be sure to employ a light touch with your fretting hand, but a firm pick attack.

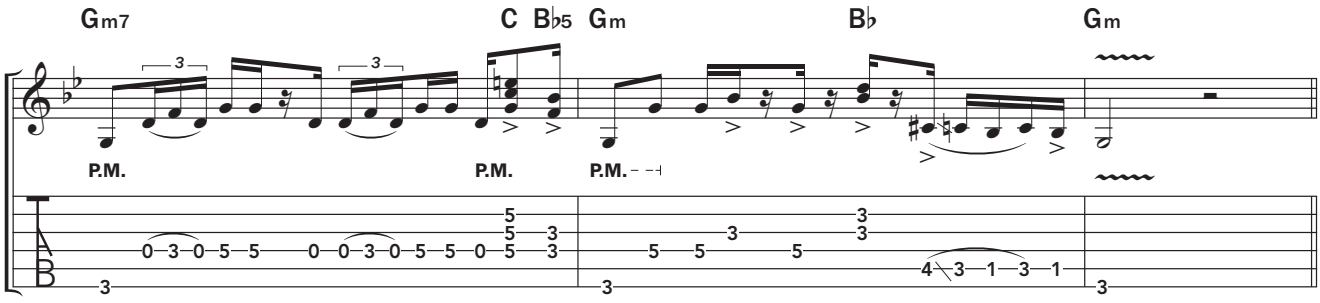
The last nine bars reveal how Van Halen simulated the traditional flamenco technique, in which the fingers tremolo-pick notes on the treble strings while the thumb sounds a melody below. Eschewing your picking fingers, use a flatpick to produce the tremolo effect on the open E, B, and G strings. I suggest taking a cue from Van Halen and holding the pick between your thumb and middle finger, while using your wrist, rather than your elbow, for the rapid back-and-forth motion of the tremolo picking.

Starting in bar 2, while maintaining the tremolo-picking on the open strings, play the melody on the low E string with your fretting hand. For the open notes, you'll need to use your first finger to pick the string, and the fretted notes will be played with the "hammer-ons from nowhere" described in Ex 6. For this tricky melody, use whatever fingering combination feels comfortable for sounding the melody in a clean way.

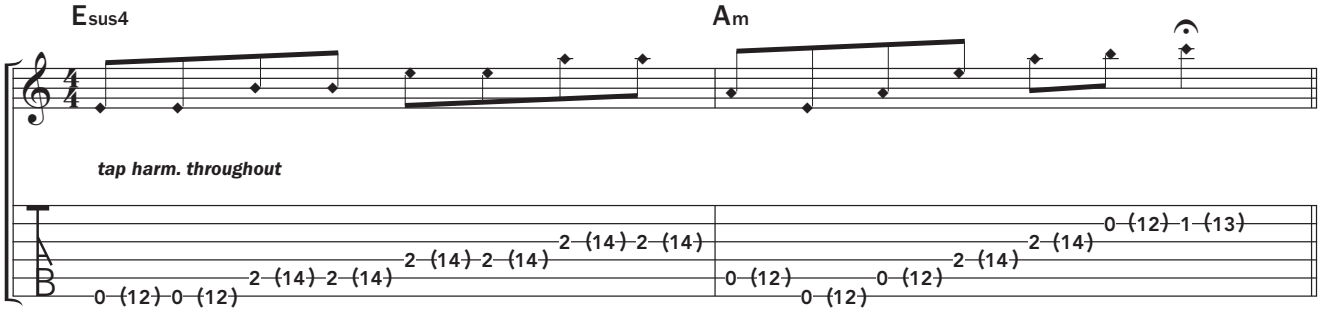
It's been said that it's not about what guitar you play, but how you play it. For undeniable proof, just listen to Eddie Van Halen unplugged, whether on steel- or nylon-string guitar. Even wiithout the dimed Marshall amps, the whammy bar, the pedals, the rack gear—any of it—Van Halen sounded like no one but himself.

Chris Buono is a guitarist and educator based in Toms River, NJ. He plays myriad styles on fretted and fretless guitars and has produced instructional content for TrueFire, Hal Leonard, and other music publishers. chrisbuono.com

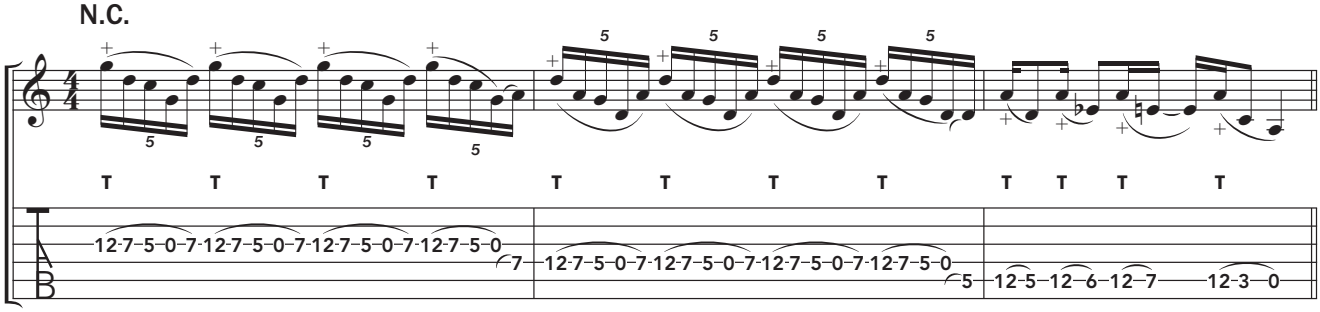
Continued from p. 19



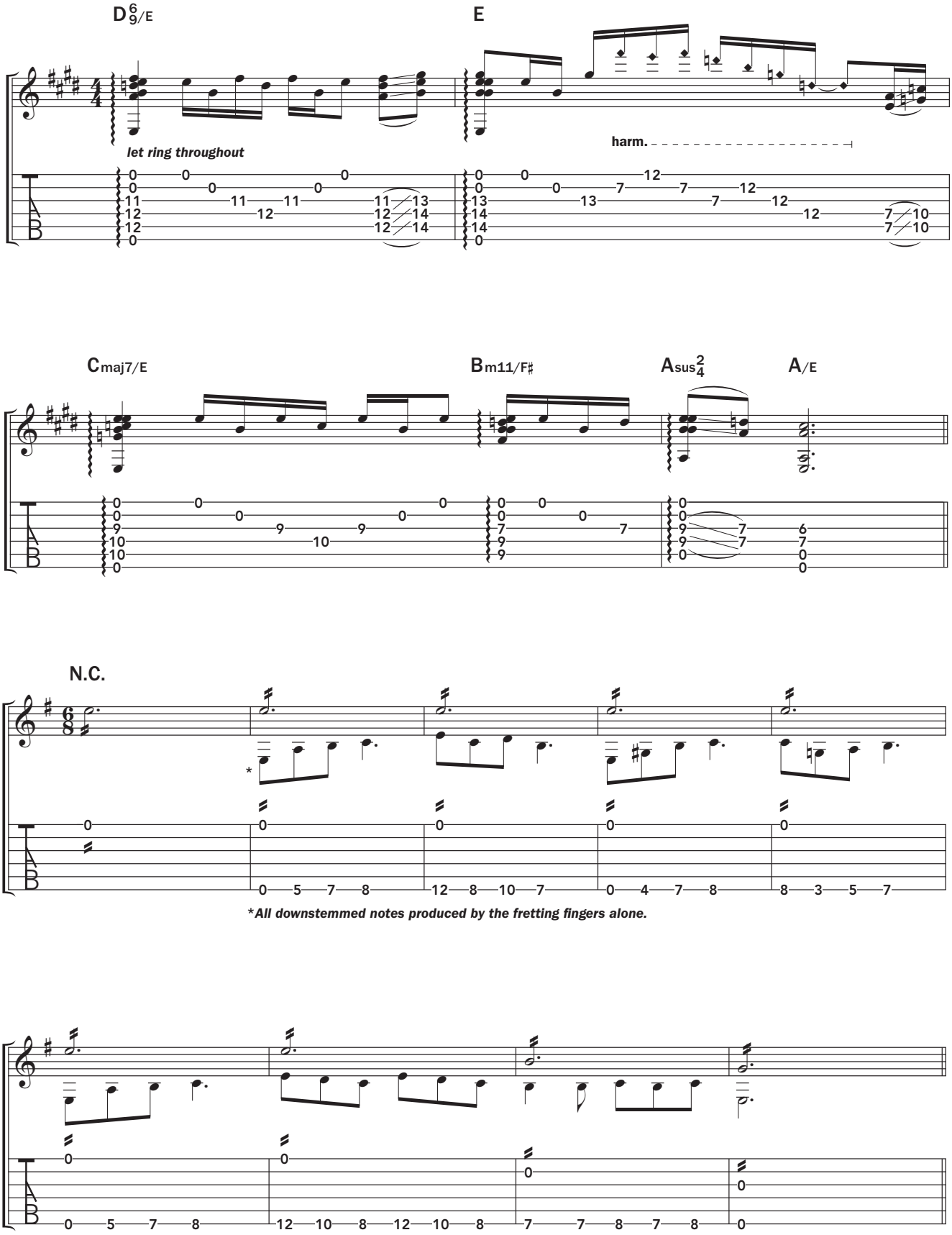
Example 5 (à la "Spanish Fly")

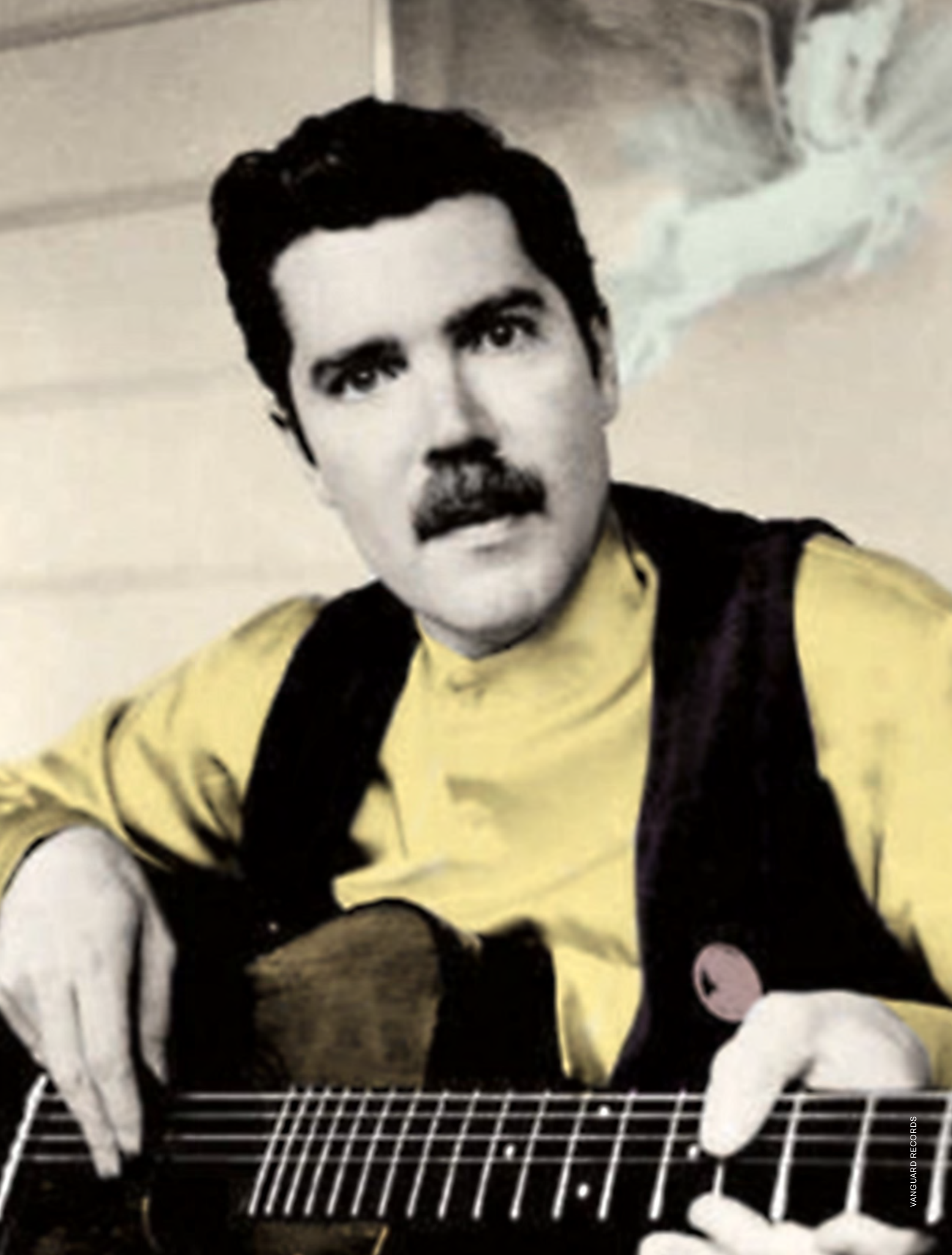


Example 6 (à la "Spanish Fly")



Example 7 (à la "Little Guitars (Intro)")




VANGUARD RECORDS

Songs of Great Mystery

Guitarists Richard Osborn and Glenn Jones shed some light on the late, enigmatic Robbie Basho

BY GLENN KIMPTON

Although he grew up in Maryland alongside such American Primitive guitar pioneers as John Fahey and Max Ochs, also releasing several albums on Fahey's Takoma label, guitarist and singer Robbie Basho expanded on the style by bringing Hindi, Indian, Japanese, and Native American music into his playing. A very religious and exploratory man, it seems that Basho had to strike out further to satisfy his creative hunger. In a rare recorded interview from 1974, he is explaining the approach to his current style of guitar playing in his laconic, Christopher Walken–esque voice. "Meat and potatoes doesn't do it for me anymore," he says, and explains that he wants to "see how many ways a guitar can be portrayed." The result of his exploration, studying many cultures, religions, and styles, is one of the most exhilarating and challenging catalogs of guitar music in history. At the time of his death, in 1986, Basho's genius was not widely acknowledged, but with the 2020 release of *Song of the Avatars: The Lost Master Tapes* box set and Liam Barker's *Voice of the Eagle* documentary, recognition seems to be growing.

Guitarist Richard Osborn, once a student of Basho's, reveals how he came to recognize the power of this singular artist. "I had become one of those guitarists who had learned all of John Fahey's pieces and was kind of blown away," Osborn begins, "but I had never really found any personal freedom in the style. Because of the Takoma label, I had heard some of Robbie's earlier albums, like *The Seal of the Blue Lotus* and *The Grail & the Lotus*, which were very impressive, but the pieces were more like compositions. It wasn't until late 1967 or early '68 that he came and played at Stanford and by that point we were into the material that showed up on the *Falconer's Arm* albums, much more open-ended raga stuff."

> **'Basho had a way of comporting himself like he was an ambassador from another plane or another time.'**
> **–RICHARD OSBORN**

Like Osborn, guitarist Glenn Jones, a friend of Basho's, first encountered his music vicariously through Fahey. "I bought my first Basho album, *The Grail & the Lotus*, after discovering and becoming intrigued by the music of Fahey," Jones says. "Both were solo acoustic guitarists, and both played for Takoma, but I quickly discovered that any similarities between the two pretty much ended there, except for one: Neither considered playing the guitar as an end unto itself, both viewed playing as a way to get to something beyond music."

ECCENTRIC, DRIVEN, AND POWERFUL

Basho was interested in deeply exploring cultures and religions, and his commitment to something greater certainly had an effect on people around him. "I was kind of in awe of him," Osborn says of studying with Basho. "The thing about Robbie was that he had a gravitas and a power about his person, so you could find his music very moving, and to hear him in person and feel that presence added a lot of impact. But he pretty much stayed in persona most of the time. He had a way of comporting himself like he was an ambassador from another plane or another time. He was eccentric

and driven with a personal vision that fueled his engine, like monomania."

I suggest to Osborn that Fahey also perhaps shared some of these characteristics. "Oh, absolutely," he nods. "But although both were socially awkward, John was far more withdrawn. I remember seeing Fahey at a show at the Jabberwock in Berkeley and he played this 20-minute improvisation and blew everyone away, and then stopped playing and was drinking his whiskey and coke and just sitting there staring off into the rafters. Somebody called out, 'Hey John, why are you looking up there?' and he just said, 'Because there's no people up there.'

"Robbie conducted himself publicly in a very courtly but very intense way. I recall in one of our lessons he was talking about conserving psychic energy; he looked at being in the world and engaging people as draining one's energy. I remember him saying, 'You'll notice that I'll rarely look at you directly,' and as he said that his eyes popped up and he looked straight at me and I felt a force like I had been shoved in the chest; there was this literal power to him."

When discussing the music of Fahey and Basho, Jones shares a few key points. "I think Basho's challenges were greater than Fahey's," he says. "As with Fahey, Basho's music is unmistakably his own, but it's perhaps more personal and deeper. Fahey created his music by synthesizing influences from all over, whereas Basho created his almost from whole cloth. He had his influences—he took classes with [sarod virtuoso] Ali Akbar Khan in Berkeley, California, after all—but he didn't wear his influences on his sleeve quite the way Fahey did. Even when Basho was working within the realms of Indian or Persian music, or when he was reworking a classical guitar piece he heard on a Presti and Lagoya record, what he actually played belonged to himself. You'd never mistake his music for the music of anyone else."

Unfortunately, his creative genius didn't extend to the classroom. "He was not a good teacher," Osborn says with a smile. "For one thing, he was very wrapped up in his process and his ongoing and very restless energetic exploration. But also, his character was not the kind to stop and wonder what it was that made his music and how he could convey that to someone. He could have greatly benefited from having disciples and I was certainly willing to be one. I had gone to him hoping to be led into how to explore things in this raga style, but he was not able to convey that."

AN UNEASY FREEDOM

A significant detail when considering Basho alongside Fahey and other players is the level of success each enjoyed: Fahey was quite unstoppable throughout much of his career, whereas Robbie struggled to achieve the recognition he deserved. Osborn is still bemused: "It's totally mysterious. [Windham Hill Records founder] Will Ackerman wanted to get Robbie to ride his coattails if he could, and it baffled him, it baffles Glenn Jones, and I can't figure it out either."

Jones attempts an explanation: "With John, you have that syncopated right hand. Its alternating bass is setting a dogged pace and feel, so no matter what journey he took you on as a listener, he seldom left you feeling at sea; you were well grounded. With Robbie, you have to let go and entrust yourself to his care. He can leave you feeling unsure of the ground under your feet, and not everyone likes that feeling. Especially in his compositions for 12-string guitar, played in what he called his 'galloping rondo' right-hand approach, he had the ability to create a pool of sound that you can dive into and get lost in. There is mystery in Basho's music and the sense that he's invented his own arcane symbolism, and that it's up to us to make sense of it. He requires work from his listeners. I also think there's more freedom in Basho's music than in Fahey's, a willingness to follow his muse no matter where it leads him. And freedom can be scary."

Interestingly, when Will Ackerman did sign Basho to Windham Hill, the material Basho produced is seen by Osborn to be less powerful than much that came before it. "Will was a fan of Basho's, and he loved his music, so he wanted to help further his career," he explains. "But it seems to me that Robbie was making some kind of calculation, thinking that his double-thumbing technique was where it was at. A lot of people of are big fans of those two Windham Hill albums [*Visions of the Country* and *Art of the Acoustic Steel String Guitar 6 & 12*], but I'm not. To me, it was a step back. Robbie said that a lot of people had criticized him for playing these long ragas, but I was in the other camp; I wished he had rambled longer." Asked if this change of style perhaps suggested a lack of self-belief, Osborn says, "I certainly read it that way, although I don't think other people did. But after Windham Hill came a series of albums, and Liam Barker's film really helped me understand Basho a lot more at that stage. I had always thought of him as a guitarist, but I realized that he was really a troubadour. He was a singer and that was his passion." AG

UNEARTHED TREASURES

Last year saw the release of *Song of the Avatars: The Lost Master Tapes*, a five-disc box set of previously unreleased Robbie Basho material that was unearthed by filmmaker Liam Barker during the making of *Voice of the Eagle*. It was put out through Josh Rosenthal's Tompkins Square label, but Rosenthal takes little credit. "The idea for the box came out of the film," he says. "When I learned about the trove of tapes which appears on film for a moment, I approached Liam. Everything from there was his direction."

"It is essentially my baby," Barker confirms. "I had tapes transferred at a recording studio, programmed tracks, and worked with the designer and mastering engineer." He takes us further back: "After Basho's death, it was rumored that the religious order he was initiated into, Sufism Reoriented, had most of his belongings. After a preview for the film was published, a Meher Baba lover contacted me, which led to him providing me with a list of contacts."

This serendipitous contact led to treasures, including Basho's 12-string guitar (see Great Acoustics on p. 82), an unpublished songbook, and a collection of master tapes, rich with eye-opening material. "*Song of the Avatars* treats us to some of Basho's ventures into territory not previously charted on record," Barker says. "Some have said that he wasn't the best judge of his own work, but the fact that he never released some of this material is confounding. It presents a parallel pathway to his entire commercially released discography and is quite a ride." *—GK*

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'The guitar is capable of ravishing beauty and its sound can project incredible feelings and colors. A well-played guitar is irresistible. I love it now more than ever before.'
–MANUEL BARRUECO

STEPHEN SPARTANA

Voyage of Discovery

CLASSICAL GUITAR STANDARD BEARER MANUEL BARRUECO REVISITS HIS ROOTS IN THE MUSIC OF SPAIN AND CUBA

BY MARK SMALL

Speaking about recording his upcoming album, classical guitar giant Manuel Barrueco asked in a recent phone interview: "Do you know 'A la Cubana' by Enrique Granados? I have re-recorded it three times because the arrangement just wasn't right. It's hard and it's supposed to sound easy. That's a bad combination," he joked. The exchange gave me pause. Barrueco is renowned for his pristine playing and absolute mastery of his instrument and the music. He went on to explain that making his forthcoming album at home—especially during a pandemic—offered abundant time, giving him the opportunity to get very picky and make sure every take was optimal.

COTTAGE INDUSTRY

Barrueco and his wife, Asgerdur Sigurdardottir—who serves as his recording engineer and co-producer—work together in a nice acoustic space that doubles as a wine cellar in their Maryland home. The new album will be the 14th release by Tonar Music, an imprint the couple established to issue the Manuel Barrueco Collection of recordings and sheet music editions of his transcriptions. Tonar's first CD was the Grammy-nominated *Solo Piazzolla* of 2006. Successive albums have featured Barrueco alone and playing with former students (now protégés) Meng Su, Yameng Wang, and Franco Platino, a solo record by Lukaz Kuropaczewski, and more.

In 2019, Barrueco toured with a program titled "Music of Spain and Cuba," and his upcoming solo CD (untitled at the time of this writing) highlights selections from that program. His exploration of this repertoire was partially inspired by his search for his ancestral roots. His great-grandfather, Manuel Barrueco Diez, emigrated from Spain to Cuba and fought in the Spanish-American War for Spain in 1898. He returned to his homeland after the defeat, but the guitarist's great-grandmother remained in Cuba with the children. Our Manuel Barrueco was born in Santiago de Cuba, in 1952, and lived there until his family came to America as political refugees in 1967.

"In recent years, I've become aware of my Spanish roots," Barrueco says. His forebears lived in Fermoselle, a small medieval town on the northwest border of Spain and Portugal. "I visited a few years ago and found the Barrueco name is very common there."

He became intrigued by the nexus between Spanish and Cuban music. For the album, he recorded transcriptions that include Cuba-inspired piano works by Spanish composers Joaquín Malats (1872–1912), Enrique Granados (1867–1916), Isaac Albéniz (1859–1909), and Sebastián Iradier (1809–1865). Five vihuela works by Renaissance composer Luys de Narváez (1500–1547) connect to the guitar's Spanish lineage. Overt Cuban musical elements appear in five transcriptions of piano scores by Ignacio Cervantes (1847–1905), a lifelong resident of Havana, and Joaquín Nin-Culmell (1908–2004), born in Berlin to Cuban parents. Tonar will publish two volumes of Barrueco's transcriptions of music for the album. The first book will contain the five transcriptions from Cervantes' *40 Danzas*. The second will include "La Paloma" (Iradier), "La Morena" (Malats), and "A la Cubana" (Granados).

The four-movement *Sonata* that Puerto Rican composer Roberto Sierra penned for Barrueco is the album's outlier. It represents 21st-century music for the guitar with Caribbean influences. "Roberto's *Sonata* is a massive work and an important one," Barrueco says. "It's a piece that needs to be out there getting played. It's not as easy to listen to as some of the other pieces on the CD. Listeners will hear solid [compositional] craftsmanship. They won't be whistling the piece on the way home, but they will be impressed by it."

PROTECTIVE OF THE GUITAR

Presenting purely classical works in his recitals is paramount for Barrueco. He is two generations down the continuum from Segovia, whose early 20th-century mission was to gain acceptance for the guitar in the classical world, sundering it from the flamenco tradition and popular music styles.

"It's not that I don't enjoy other kinds of music," Barrueco says. "I think we understand what's folkloric, what's popular, and what's classical and need to make it clear what we are doing. Today, people are

comfortable playing some things that, frankly, I don't feel belong on the concert stage.

"I don't want to come across as a snob," he continues. "I don't think a symphony is better than a pop song. You can have a symphony that's a piece of garbage and a pop song that's a jewel and work of art. I am concerned about how the guitar fits into the spectrum of classical music. I like everything, including rap, country, and rock music. I can't think of any popular or folkloric music that I don't like. But I feel there should be a distinction between musical styles. I try to play programs that will please the serious listener so that someone who goes to piano concerts might enjoy it and find meaning in the music. I am not necessarily a purist, but I am when it comes to the classical guitar. I try to be protective of it."

Barrueco has, however, made some highly successful excursions outside the classical realm with albums for the EMI label showcasing music by Paul Simon, Keith Jarrett, Chick Corea, and others. His disc of Lennon and McCartney songs in solo, duo, and orchestral settings, crafted by Leo Brouwer, Tōru Takemitsu, and others is exceptional. He also recorded with guitarists Al Di Meola, Andy Summers, and Steve Morse. "We should do what we do best," he says. "I'm not good at playing popular music. I've done it when I had great partners who were willing to meet me halfway."

TOWARD THE FUTURE

Another way Barrueco is fostering high standards for the classical guitar is by establishing the Baltimore International Guitar Competition in conjunction with the Baltimore Classical Guitar Society, for which he is the artistic director and Sigurdardottir is president. The idea for a competition was proposed to Barrueco by a friend who offered major funding and help enlisting other donors. The debut event is slated for September 21–26, 2021, and will offer prizes totaling more than $60,000. In addition to cash, the first-prize winner will receive representation by the global artist management agency Dorn Music.

"I had become disappointed with some competitions when a player I felt should win didn't," he says. "I thought it would be fantastic if we could have one based solely on the quality of the playing, to encourage the art of the classical guitar." The planners decided to keep competitors out of the judges' view so that opinions won't be influenced by a performer's theatrics, appearance, or gender. Expert jurists will be divided evenly between guitarists and non-guitarists. "I want to have a jury that will not be political, where perhaps someone wants a student from a particular school to win," Barrueco reveals. "I want the judges to tell me which players they would like to hear again that belong on the concert stage."

The required pieces will include well-known works by Bach, Villa-Lobos, Tárrega, and Sor, alongside free-choice selections by Romantic-era, 20th-, and 21st-century composers. Mandating familiar repertoire was done with expectations that the pieces will reveal the competitors' core musical sensibilities. (For more information about the contest, visit BaltimoreGuitarCompetition.org.)

MENTOR TO MANY

In addition to performing, recording, and publishing, Barrueco's career has always included teaching. Since 1990, he has maintained a studio at Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, where he mentors a small number of students each academic year. His highly accomplished pupils, who hail from America, Asia, South America, and Europe, have won numerous competitions and gone on to successful careers.

"I remember when I was a student, the teachers that had a point of view were the ones that inspired me," he recalls. "The way the I see it, there are some things that are right or wrong and some that are a matter of opinion. I try to help my students understand the difference and I give them the tools to express what they want. Sometimes they may think I'm trying to mold them to do things as I do. But I tell them if they end up sounding like me, I've probably failed them."

UNSWERVING DEVOTION

Barrueco still maintains a robust daily practice regimen. "I work for 55 minutes, take a ten-minute break, then do another 55 minutes," he shares. "I do that twice a day. During this [pandemic] period, I have been spending hours on technique each day—scales, arpeggios, and a few other things. It's important. Some of my students don't practice scales, they just work on difficult passages in the pieces they're playing. I think that's a big mistake. There is a need to stay in shape by playing scales. It's one of the hardest things in classical guitar and is like jogging for an athlete. Practicing is the highlight of my day. I love sitting with a cup of cappuccino and looking out my window at the trees. It's really peaceful.

"I originally fell in love with the guitar, but then felt that music in general was more enjoyable. There is another level when it becomes art. The guitar is capable of ravishing beauty and its sound can project incredible feelings and colors. It's not just the colors though, it's what you can do by combining them in certain ways. A well-played guitar is irresistible. I love it now more than ever before." AG

WHAT HE PLAYS

For 48 years, Manuel Barrueco has played a 1972 Robert Ruck guitar with traditional bracing, a cedar top, Brazilian rosewood sides, and a long-scale neck. Except for a few tracks on his *Medea* album, he has used his Ruck number 58 for every solo recording. (He even published a book about the guitar.) Live and for concerto recordings, he plays guitars by Matthias Dammann with sandwich-braced cedar tops and long-scale necks. Regarding strings, Barrueco says, "It's complicated." Through the years he's played sets by Augustine, D'Addario, Savarez, and Hannabach. He currently uses Augustine Gold trebles and medium-tension Savarez semi-polished basses on the Ruck for recording. On his Dammanns, he uses Hannabach Titanyl trebles and Savarez basses.

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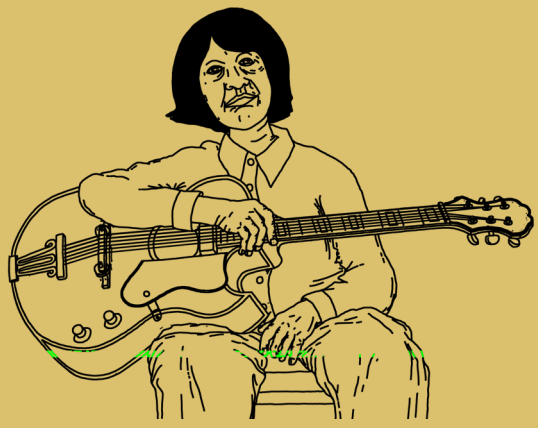


Precious Bryant

Etta Baker

Algia Mae Hinton

and
Geeshie Wiley

Out of the Shadows

Undersung women of the blues and their vast contributions to the music

By Valerie Turner

Illustrations by Bill Evans

Let's be honest—role models for contemporary women playing blues guitar are few and far between. This isn't because they're not out there; it's simply because they aren't well recognized. I can't tell you how many times as a performer I've shown up for a soundcheck, guitar in hand, only to be asked if I was a roadie or a fan. The assumption is never that I might be there to play an instrument, let alone a guitar. But this is nothing new—early blues women that played guitar didn't receive equal attention, either.

Female vocalists captured the ears and hearts of the blues-loving public early on, and the mere mention of blues singers immediately brings to mind artists like Ma Rainey, Ida Cox, and Bessie Smith. However, when thinking about blues guitarists, this nearly always elicits the names of men, with little consideration for their female counterparts whose legacies are just as important. You're probably already familiar with artists like Elizabeth Cotten, Memphis Minnie, and Sister Rosetta Tharpe—all giants in their respective blues arenas. This article will highlight other female blues guitarists who helped shaped the blues; masterly musicians who don't always receive the recognition they deserve.

But first, let's first take a look at the world in which they lived. Making its debut in the late 19th century, blues music was the soundtrack of the Jim Crow era, a time when state legislators had enacted laws that legalized racial discrimination and segregation in the United States. Life for Black women in the South at the turn of the 20th century was far from easy, and this is reflected in many of the blues songs left behind. From front porches to family gatherings to picnics to jook joints, blues music tells the stories of African American people navigating a new and difficult existence. Just about every human experience and emotion has been captured in blues songs, and many of the topics covered are still relevant today. This is one of the reasons why this music is timeless and speaks to so many people in diverse places.

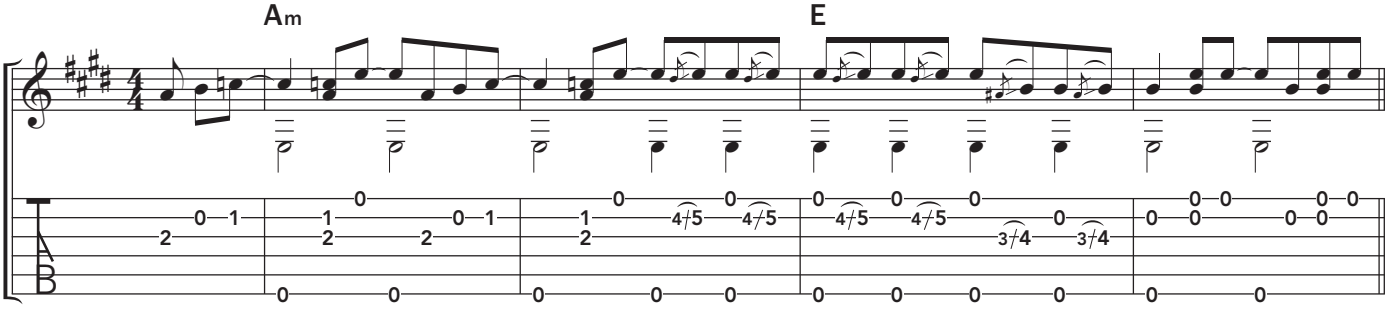
Several common threads connect most of the artists profiled here. For example, many came from musical families and got their start playing and singing in churches or at local events. You'll also notice that family and work obligations often took priority over more artistic endeavors, thwarting their music careers until they neared middle age.

HAUNTING AND MYSTERIOUS

Starting with one of my favorite early blues artists, let's take a look at Geeshie Wiley. Details about Wiley are sparse, and no one can say for sure when or where she was born. Some think she may have come from Louisiana or Mississippi, and her birthdate is placed somewhere in the early 20th century. Things we do know about Geeshie Wiley include that she was either married to or living with hokum performer Charlie McCoy, and that she was romantically linked to Casey Bill Weldon, Memphis Minnie's first husband.

According to Ishmon Bracey, a Delta blues musician from Byram, Mississippi, Wiley was also known to perform publicly in Jackson, Mississippi, around 1930. This is where she came to the attention of H.C. Speir, who owned a local furniture store. Speir was also a

Example 1 (à la Geeshie Wiley's "Last Kind Words")
Tune down 1/2 step



talent scout, and he introduced Wiley to the Paramount recording company, in Grafton, Wisconsin, where she traveled with her duet partner, Elvie Thomas, to make their iconic 1930 recordings. During that session, Wiley accompanied Thomas on "Motherless Child Blues" and "Over to My House." Wiley also made two solo recordings, "Last Kind Words" and "Skinny Leg Blues." The following year, Wiley and Thomas returned to Grafton, where Wiley recorded two more songs, "Pick Poor Robin Clean" as a duet with Thomas, and "Eagles on a Half" as another solo piece. These six songs are representative of an era in which contemporary African American music was evolving into what we now call blues.

The raw, eerie sounds of Wiley's guitar, combined with her haunting vocals, make a lasting impression and solidify her place among the early blues greats. Some other artists that you might recognize who were recorded by Paramount at roughly the same time include Charley Patton, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Skip James. Although her recorded repertoire is limited, Geeshie Wiley's music is well worth a listen and will leave you wondering what else she played that was never captured.

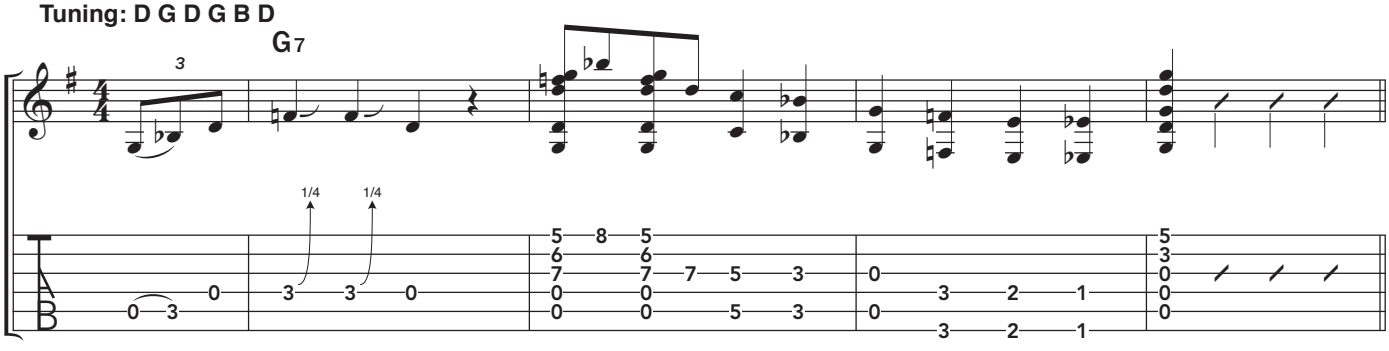
The notation in **Example 1** is inspired by Geeshie Wiley's "Last Kind Words." Played in E, part of the song's eeriness can be attributed to its use of the iv chord (Am) in a major-key context. One important thing to keep in mind when playing the slides in bars 3 and 4 is that the destination note (either the fifth-fret E or the fourth-fret B) is the one that counts. This becomes clear when you listen to the original recording.

D.C. INSPIRATION

Flora Molton (née Flora Rollins) of Virginia is our next subject. Born partially blind in 1908, she underwent surgery, which eventually allowed her to read large print. Molton's father was a West Virginia preacher who played accordion, while her mother, a housewife, was an organist. Following in her father's footsteps, Molton began a ministry of her own, but raising two children through preaching proved difficult. Flora eventually relocated to Washington, D.C., where she became a street performer. While Molton is generally categorized as a gospel musician, one important thing to understand is that the blues and gospel are tightly coupled. As explained by country blues master John Cephas in a 2009 interview for the Library of Virginia, "Musically, there's no difference between the blues and the gospel presentation. The only difference is the context . . . Lyrically, they talk about two different things that happen in your life."

Using a metal slide, Molton played guitar while singing, adding percussion with a tambourine that she tapped with her foot. She was a fixture at busy intersections along F Street NW, in Washington, and her rural sound inspired local blues musicians, including Phil Wiggins. Wiggins, a young harmonica player who often accompanied her, went on to become an NEA National Heritage Fellow and internationally acclaimed as part of the Cephas & Wiggins duo. Molton also influenced Eleanor Ellis, a Louisiana native now living in Maryland. Ellis learned from and performed with Molton and, these days, can be heard playing

Example 2 (à la Flora Molton's "The Sun Will Shine in Vietnam")
Tuning: D G D G B D



one of Molton's signature songs, "The Sun Will Shine in Vietnam."

Molton was a clear influence on the Washington blues scene. In fact, she was one of the founders of the D.C. Blues Society. In addition to local and regional performances, she also enjoyed a successful European tour and remained musically active until shortly before passing away in 1990, at the age of 82.

Example 2 is patterned after the intro to Flora Molton's signature song, "The Sun Will Shine in Vietnam." Though Molton was known for her work in open-D tuning, she typically sang the piece while accompanied by guitarist Ed Morris, who played in open G, as notated here. The intro is off to a dramatic start with a hammer-on flourish in the pickup bar, followed by the bent Fs that imply a G7 chord. Beginning in the second half of bar 2, a descending, octave-based line brings it all back home.

MISTRESS OF THE PIEDMONT STYLE

Looking toward North Carolina, we find Etta Baker (née Etta Lucille Reid). Born in 1913, Baker came from a large, musical family. She was skilled at playing both guitar and banjo and learned directly from her multi-instrumentalist father, Boone Reid.

Baker played in what is known as the Piedmont style of fingerpicking. As the name suggests, it's an approach originating from the Piedmont region, which runs along the east coast of the United States from Virginia to Georgia. In the Piedmont style, the thumb of the picking hand alternates between two bass strings while the remaining fingers of the picking hand play a syncopated melody, giving the illusion of two guitars being played at once. Baker's command of the style was impressive, but her talents were largely unknown outside her circle of family and friends until she reached her 40s. Although she performed locally with her father and sister for family gatherings and parties, Baker's main priorities were her job as a textile worker, caring for her husband, and raising their nine children.

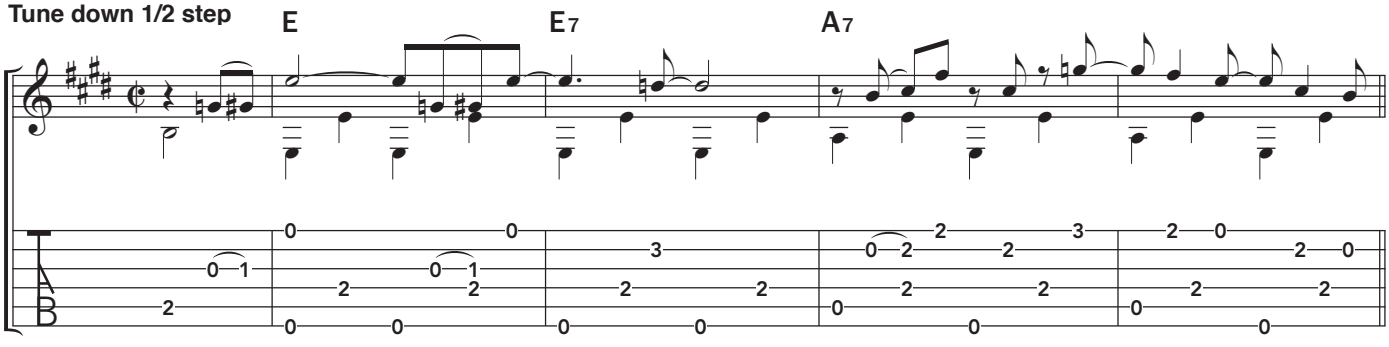
Folklorist Paul Clayton captured Baker in field recordings while scouring the region for traditional music in the 1950s. The subsequent inclusion of these recordings on the compilation *Instrumental Music of the Southern Appalachians* finally put a spotlight on Baker's music, inspiring the likes of Taj Mahal and Bob Dylan. One song that she is especially known for playing is Blind Lemon Jefferson's "One Dime Blues"; Baker's version has a smooth and flowing texture, whereas Jefferson's sound is more staccato.

Baker was respected by other Piedmont-style guitar players from the Tidewater region of North Carolina and Virginia, such as John Cephas, Archie Edwards, John Jackson, and others. Passing away in 2006, Baker's recognitions include the North Carolina Folklore Society Brown-Hudson Award, North Carolina Heritage Award, and National Heritage Award.

Example 3 is inspired by Etta Baker's classic interpretation of Blind Lemon Jefferson's "One Dime Blues." Pay special attention to the alternating bass line in bars 3 and 4. While the second and fourth beats of these measures are always played on the D string, the first and third beats additionally alternate between the low E and A strings.

Example 3 (à la Etta Baker's arrangement of "One Dime Blues")

Tune down 1/2 step



MUSIC AND DANCE

Blues music is dance music, and both came together perfectly in Algia Mae Hinton (née Algia Mae O'Neal) of North Carolina. Her father, Alexander O'Neal, was a dancer and taught Hinton the art of buck dancing—a percussive soft-shoe folk dance originating among African Americans during the antebellum period. Taught by her talented, multi-instrumentalist mother, Ollie O'Neal, Hinton also learned how to play guitar.

Born in 1929 into a hard life of farm work, Hinton helped her family tend crops of tobacco, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, and corn. Years later, when she was married with seven children, her husband met an untimely death, leaving her to raise their family alone. A resourceful woman, she made ends meet doing seasonal farm work that she supplemented by dancing and playing guitar. Hinton was such a skilled performer that she often buck danced while playing her guitar behind her head. One of her best remembered compositions is "Cook Cornbread for Your Husband (Biscuits for Your Outside Man)."

Hinton's early performances were confined to local events such as dances and house parties. Through folklorist Glenn Hinson, currently an associate professor at the University of North Carolina, Hinton accepted an invitation to perform at the North Carolina Folklife Festival in 1978. This break led to other prestigious engagements, including the Chicago University Folk Festival, National Folk Festival, and even New York's Carnegie Hall. Hinton also gave numerous presentations to school children, exposing them to some of the music and dance traditions of the Piedmont region. Her only performance outside of the United States was in Italy.

Hinton's passing was mourned by her fans in 2018. A recipient of the North Carolina Heritage Award, she embodied the expressive music she played and listening to her is like listening to her very soul.

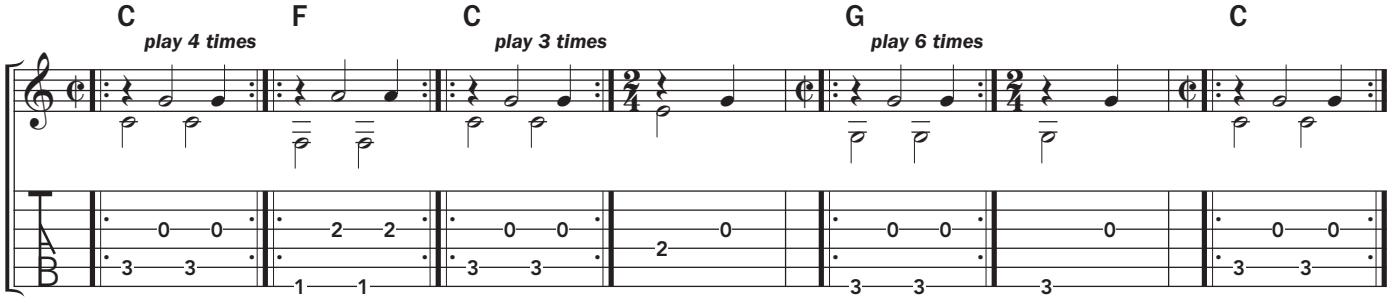
Example 4 is fun and easy, inspired by the chorus of Algia Mae Hinton's "Cook Cornbread for Your Husband (and Biscuits for Your Outside Man)." Note that the downstemmed notes are picked with the thumb and the upstemmed ones with the index finger. To achieve Hinton's resonant sound in the absence of a 12-string guitar, such as the one she likely used to record this song, be sure to fret the entire chord for each bar and experiment with lightly brushing two or three strings instead of just playing single notes.

DOWN-HOME COUNTRY BLUES

Like so many other blues musicians, Precious Bryant, born in 1942, came from a musical family with traditions that spanned blues, gospel, and folk. Indeed, her cousins were part of the Georgia Fife and Drum Band. She learned to play guitar from her father at an early age and banjo was also in her musical arsenal. In her hometown of Talbot, in west-central Georgia, Bryant got a solid start in singing by performing in a Baptist church with her sisters. This experience helped inform the gospel and spiritual aspects of her repertoire.

Listening to Bryant's music, you'll hear a blend of the traditional fingerpicking that has come to be associated with musicians from the

Example 4 (à la Algia Mae Hinton's "Cook Cornbread")



Piedmont region mixed with the electric sounds of Mississippi artists like Elmore James, Jimmy Reed, and Muddy Waters. One possible explanation for this diversity could be from Bryant's exposure to a variety of artists on records and the radio. In her 20s, Bryant received attention from folklorist George Mitchell, who recorded her in the late 1960s, but at least ten years would pass before Bryant's music career gained real traction.

Performing both domestically and abroad, Bryant's warmth and energy made her a fan favorite. She passed away in 2012 and is especially remembered for her ability to engage her audience. Her first album, *Fool Me Good*, was recognized in the form of two Blues Music Award nominations. Bryant also received a nomination for Traditional Blues Female Artist of the Year.

Example 5, inspired by "Fool Me Good," showcases Precious Bryant's fine fingerpicking style, which gives the illusion of two guitars playing at once. In this example, quarter-step bends in bars 2 and 3 add to the bluesy vibe. Using the first finger, create an A7 chord by barring the first two strings at the second fret, and add the second finger to string 1, fret 3. This creates a solid base from which to bend the third-fret G, by pushing the first string slightly upward with the second finger after picking it.

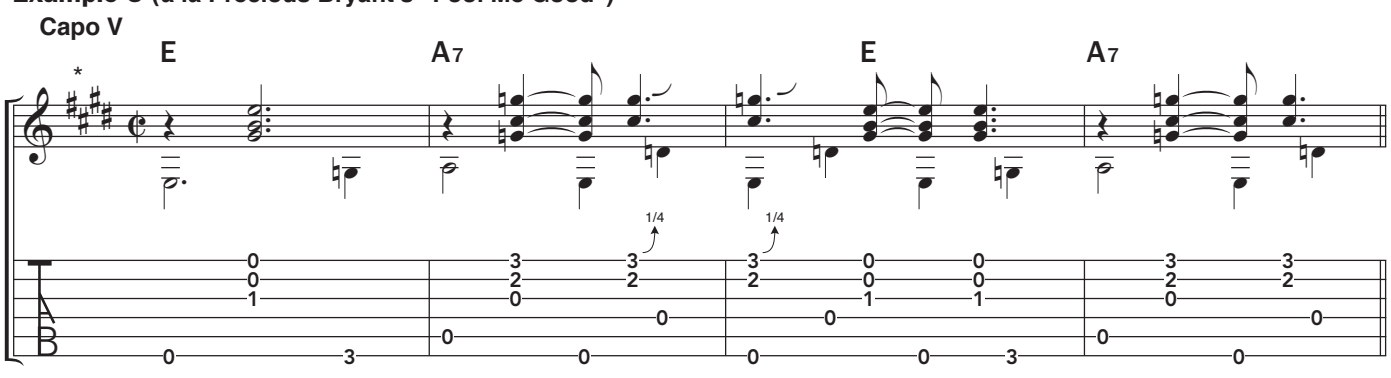
THE LEGACY CONTINUES

The musical contributions of the women highlighted here represent a variety of styles that have influenced today's contemporary blues artists. Modern-day trailblazers Bonnie Raitt and Rory Block are household names in the blues business, but there are others that you should know about.

Look to Ruthie Foster for a dose of gospel, blues and folk. Representing the often overlooked D.C. blues scene, Eleanor Ellis is keeping Flora Molton's legacy safe. Valerie June's gentle storytelling style is reminiscent of Elizabeth Cotten, and Gaye Adegbalola carries on Algia Mae Hinton's passion for music combined with dance. The music of Memphis Minnie has found a home in the capable hands of Del Rey, and Mary Flower's ragtime fingerpicking is second to none. Offering up folk-blues originals, Jackie Merritt's songs have found an appreciative audience, while Lauren Sheehan carries on a variety of Americana traditions including blues. With impeccable fingerpicking, Joan Fenton can dissect a fretboard like no other. Erin Harpe handles the Delta Blues tradition with string-snapping precision and, for overall mastery in a variety of acoustic blues guitar styles, look no further than Shari Kane. I myself, being greatly influenced by early blues artists like Elizabeth Cotten, Etta Baker, and Mississippi John Hurt, am pleased to be a tradition bearer of the Piedmont style of fingerpicking and to continue the music traditions passed down by my late mentor, John Cephas. All of us owe a great debt to our predecessors and do our best to move the music forward—one generation at a time.

Valerie Turner is an American blues guitarist, vocalist, educator, and author based in Queens, New York. She plays in the Piedmont style and is the author of Piedmont Style Country Blues Guitar Basics. *piedmontbluz.com*

Example 5 (à la Precious Bryant's "Fool Me Good")



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Song Builder

Putting together a repertoire–and using it wisely

BY JANE MILLER

Whether you're a solo singer-songwriter or instrumentalist, or you play with a group, as you develop plans to play shows, you'll need to carefully consider your repertoire. If you've performed in bars and restaurants, then you understand the value of having a few choice standards at your fingertips. Or if an in-the-round with songwriters is your scene, then you know how important it is to have your best polished material ready, along with maybe something to workshop with the folks while you have the attention of a room full of aficionados.

Planning a concert or recital, or even just a coffeehouse gig, requires thinking about the flow and continuity of the material. Consider the concerts you've attended during which the band exited the stage mid-set, leaving one solo player in the spotlight for a song or two. Rather than a build from low to high energy, there's a rise and fall to a performance throughout its course. Here are some ways that you can build your repertoire by focusing on your goals as a player in any given environment.

1 ORGANIZE YOUR REPERTOIRE

To create an effective set list for yourself, set up three columns on a page. Fill one column with a list of songs whose chords you know from memory well enough to accompany yourself or someone else. In the second column, list all of the tunes to which you know the lyrics and melody, or just the melody if you play instrumental music. Reserve the third column for pieces you've arranged as chord-melody solos. (It's totally OK if you leave this column blank, but if you'd like to learn more about chord-melody, see Greg Ruby's lesson on page 40.)

2 KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Your list could easily take up a few pages, or even a large binder. It will be helpful for you to see what you're actually able to play for people organized in one place. Divide your song lists into stylistic categories based on the context of your performance. To be a welcomed presence as a background guitarist at a restaurant, for example, write down as many songs as you can think of that you would like to hear over dinner and drinks. Divide them into categories, one page each: soft rock hits, Beatles gems, light jazz standards, familiar traditional folk, holiday music, etc.

You might include a page for creative arrangements of unlikely pop or rock songs that you've put your own stamp on as a solo artist. For the bar crowd, the category pages will probably go heavier on the rock classics,

but there will be some crossover for these gigs. Performances in nursing homes, assisted living residences, or other music therapy environments will have pages for oldies, Great American Songbook standards, hymns, patriotic songs, and maybe some novelty tunes. Do some homework as to the age range of your crowd and find out who was on the radio when they were in their 20s.

3 CREATE A FLOW

For a concert or recital performance, compose your set based on the flow of your songs from one to the next. Pick a song to start with that you know so well you could play it in your sleep. This is when you're getting used to the room, the sound, the lights, the audience, and the overall vibe. Choose something that is positive and in the medium tempo range. Then figure out the last song. Try ending your program with an exclamation point. It could have a short, cut-off ending or a long crash and burn, but make it a memorable and obvious end to the show.

Planning a concert or recital, or even just a coffeehouse gig, requires thinking about the flow and continuity of the material.

Once you've chosen the bookends, you can fill in the middle. What key sounds good after the key of the previous song? Consider the feel. If you just played a ballad, try a medium tempo, then go into an uptempo Latin groove, followed by a 3/4 swing. Make a note of these keys and feels beside the song titles so that consulting your repertoire list will give you the ideas to fit these puzzle pieces together.

4 DEFINE YOURSELF

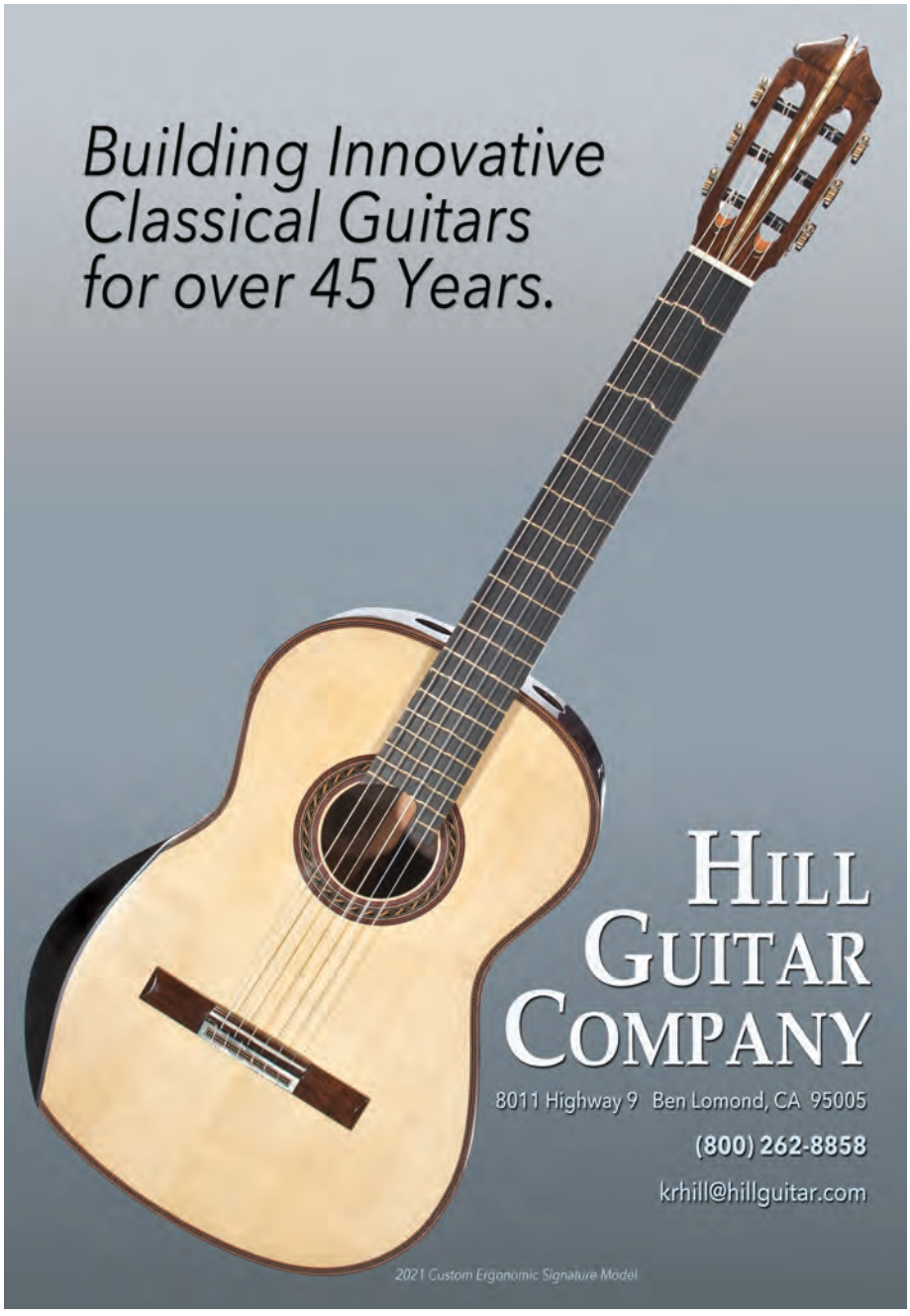
If you have been focused and serious about your songwriting, then your performances can also benefit from repertoire lists. You'll still need the three-column page containing chords, melodies, and chord-melodies that are ready to go. And you can make good use of the stylistic pages within your own catalog. Assess which of your songs are funny, which are tear-jerkers, which make people dance. You might have topical material, social statements, politically correct or otherwise. Copy and paste these titles to create the perfect set for the right crowd.

Stay alert to your audience and be ready to make substitutions on the fly. A commitment to your career as an original performer will lead to a solid reputation among your audiences and will make your decisions easier when it comes to choosing between a whole world of other people's music versus your own work.

5 BE FLEXIBLE

A performing songwriter could consider including the occasional cover song in their repertoire. Set up a page for those, too. If you do your own arrangement of "Happy Birthday" as a 4/4 bossa nova, keep it under your fingers and be ready to throw that in if you see fit. I once saw the Indigo Girls bring the house down during an encore performance of "Midnight Train to Georgia." It was just fun.

On the other hand, if you are in a cover band or are a solo player, a well-timed original song can be just the thing when you sense that people are listening, or if it is a good musical match for your repertoire. Make a note of what works and write it down for future reference. And remember that reviewing and updating your repertoire is a good practice habit, as important as running through the songs themselves. AG



Up the Neck

How to visualize a chord all along the fretboard–and apply it to a chord-melody arrangement

BY GREG RUBY

Greg Ruby

COURTESY OF GREG RUBY

THE PROBLEM:

How do you learn to play chords "up the neck" in order to learn to play a chord-melody?

THE SOLUTION:

Visualize all of the notes in a C major triad on the fretboard, explore the chord on various string groups, and then apply these concepts to a chord-melody arrangement of the jazz standard "The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise."

1 MAP IT OUT

The guitar's range of three and a half octaves provides great possibilities, but navigating the length of the neck can often be confusing. A simple way to approach playing up the neck is to find the notes of a C major triad (C E G) all over the fretboard. Once you have a map of the fretboard from the open strings to the 15th fret, as shown in **Example 1**, you will be free to travel wherever you like.

2 CONNECT THE DOTS

Now try stringing together three-note groupings of the notes C, E, and G at various locations on the fretboard. It's fun to discover some unique voicings by using this technique. **Example 2** has a few often overlooked rhythm guitar voicings that I enjoy. For some other possibilities, see **Example 3**, which takes the C triad ascending on the G, B, and high E strings, and **Example 4**, the same idea on the D, G, and B strings.

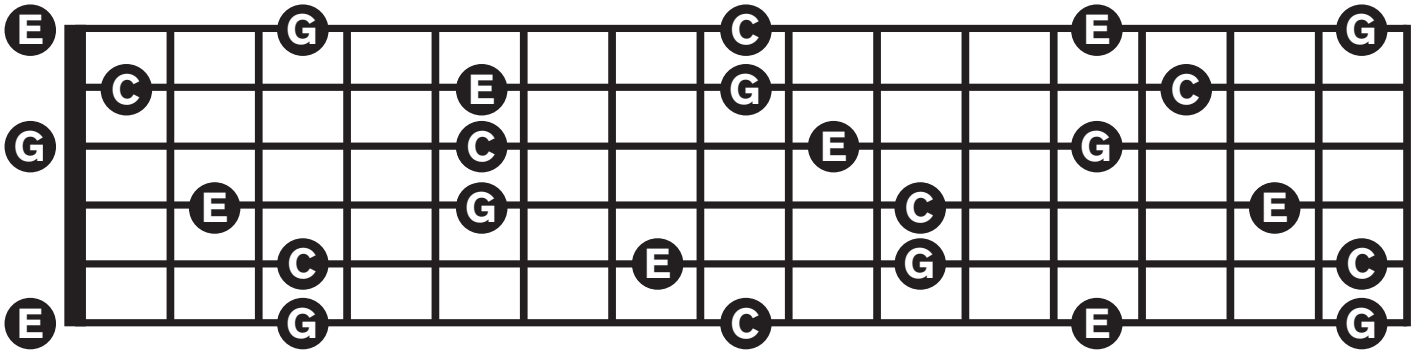
3 PLACE THINGS IN CONTEXT

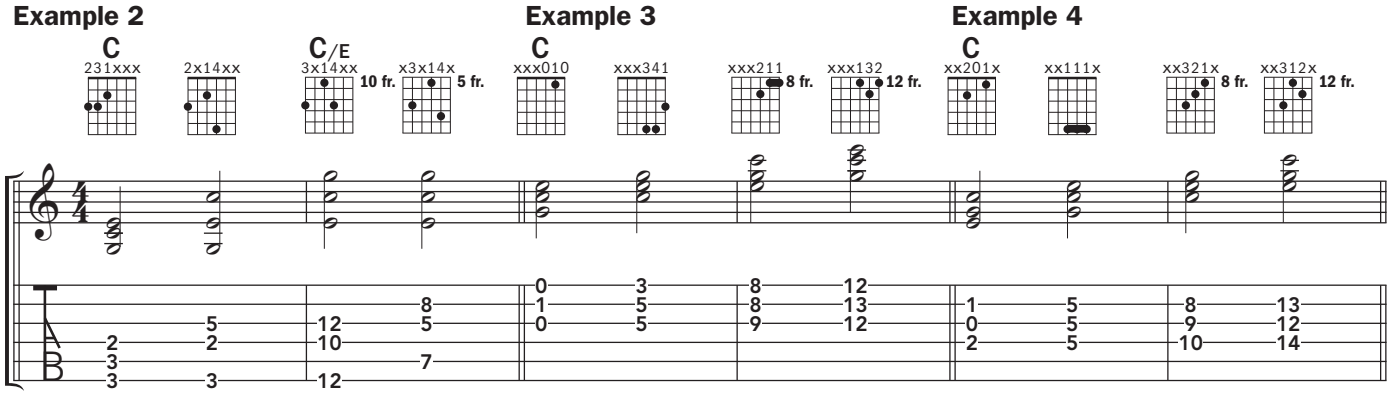
"The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise" was written by Ernest Seitz and Gene Lockhart in the midst of the 1918 flu. Made very popular through Les Paul and Mary Ford's 1951 hit version, the song has been recorded across a range of genres by Django Reinhardt, Doc Watson, and Chet Atkins, among other legendary guitarists. I started thinking about "The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise" early in the coronavirus pandemic, as its title expresses a longing that so many are feeling.

As shown in **Example 5**, the arrangement opens with a G7#5, followed by an open C chord. Keep the C shape held in the second full measure, where you'll add the third-fret G

Example 1

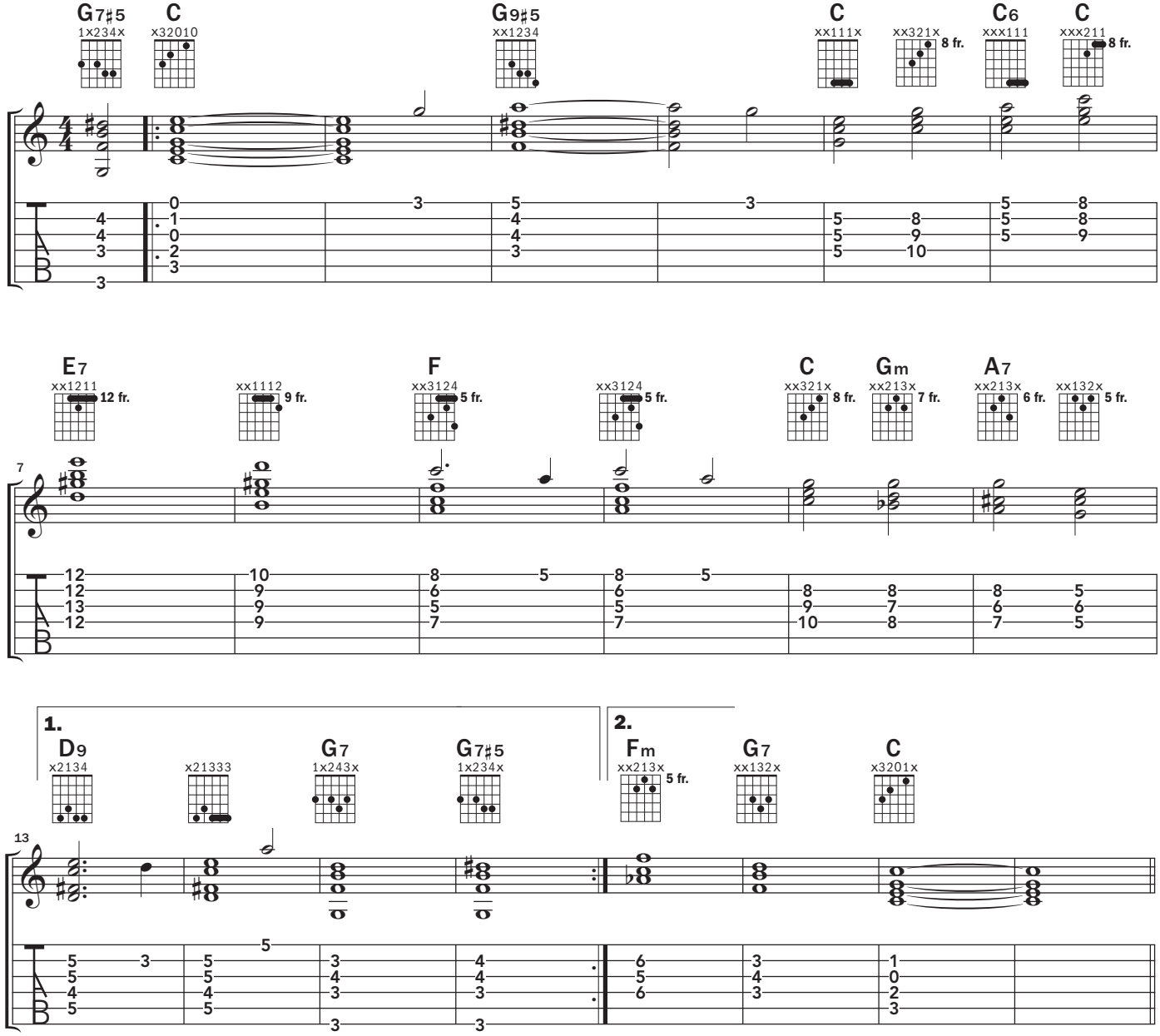
Notes in C major chord on open strings





Example 5

"The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise"



with your fourth finger. In order to make a smooth transition to the G9♯5 in the following bar, move your fourth finger up to the fifth fret while maintaining contact with the first string. Once your fourth finger arrives at its destination, organize your fingers to form the G9♯5 as indicated in the chord diagram. In this situation, I like to think of the fourth finger as the "lead dancer": It's leading the hand to the next location on the fretboard, and once it arrives, the "follow" fingers can organize around its location. Look for the lead dancer, or finger, in every chord change.

In measures 5 and 6, the C triads from Exs. 4 and 5 are used to harmonize the melody notes E, G, A, C. Changing the chord voicing for each of these notes creates nice harmonic movement while supporting the melody—the essence of the chord-melody approach. While the note A is not a note of the C chord, you can simply add it to the triad. Measures 7 and 8 use two of the inversions of an E7 (see my lesson in the January/February 2021 issue to review inversions).

Note for plectrum players: When the melody falls on the B string, strum the voicing and let the pick land (rest) on the high E string. This will help emphasize the note that matters most—the melody note. For measures 9 and 10, bar your first finger across the fifth fret in order to be able to hold the F chord down while the melody moves between the notes C and A.

Measures 11 and 12 have the most interesting harmonic movement, as the C, Gm, and A7 chords all share the eighth-fret B on string 2. After you have formed the Gm, hold your third finger in place as your first and second fingers descend one fret to form the first A7. Then, lift all your fingers to reorganize to make the second A7 (with the E melody note.) Think of this A7 as an open D shape, moved from strings 1–3 to 2–4.

Hold down the D9 in measure 13 for three beats and then release the entire chord to play the third-fret D with your first finger on beat four. When you return to D9 in measure 14, place the chord to cover the E string but to do not play the note on the E string. Instead, strum the D9 and use a rest stroke on the high E string. Then, when beat three arrives, without lifting the picking hand, let the pick fall through the high E string to hit the melody note A. This is a useful technique when the two notes of the melody are contained in the same chord voicing.

The F minor chord of measure 17 looks like the preceding A7 chord—just upside down. Always look for shape similarities, especially when you have to move all your fingers, as you do with this chord. Then you flip the shape back again to make the G7 before ending on an open C chord.

Take your time learning this arrangement. Any time you run across two chords that are difficult, practice them back and forth, thinking about which finger is leading and which is following. This should provide the insight and the repetition to make the task easier. Have fun with it, and hopefully the sunrise the world is waiting for will arrive soon.

Greg Ruby is a guitarist, composer, historian, and educator specializing in jazz from the first half of the 20th century. His latest book is The Oscar Alemán Play-Along Songbook Vol. 1. *Ruby teaches Zoom lessons and classes. For more information, visit gregrubymusic.com.*

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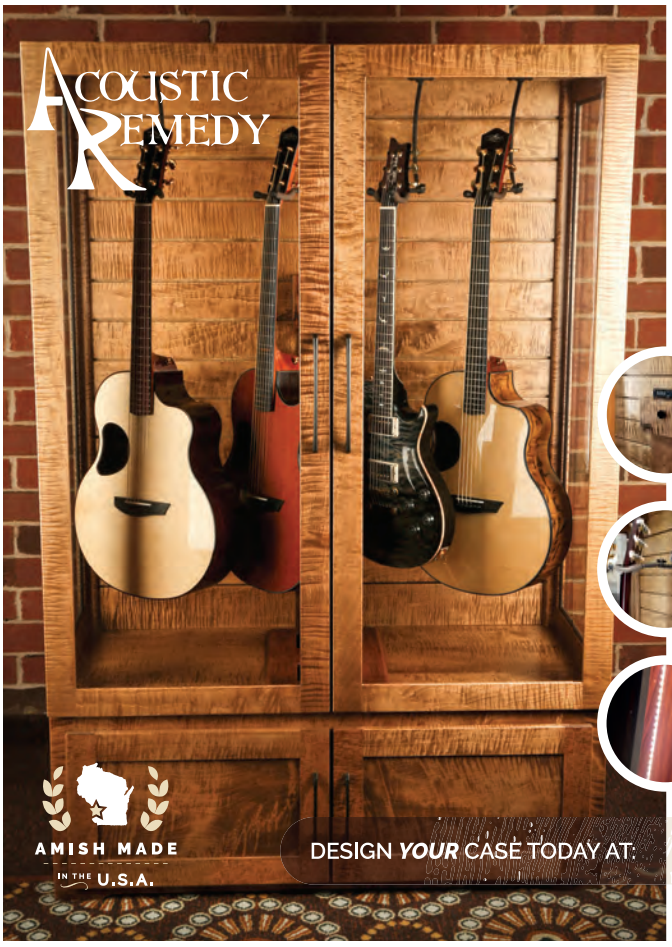

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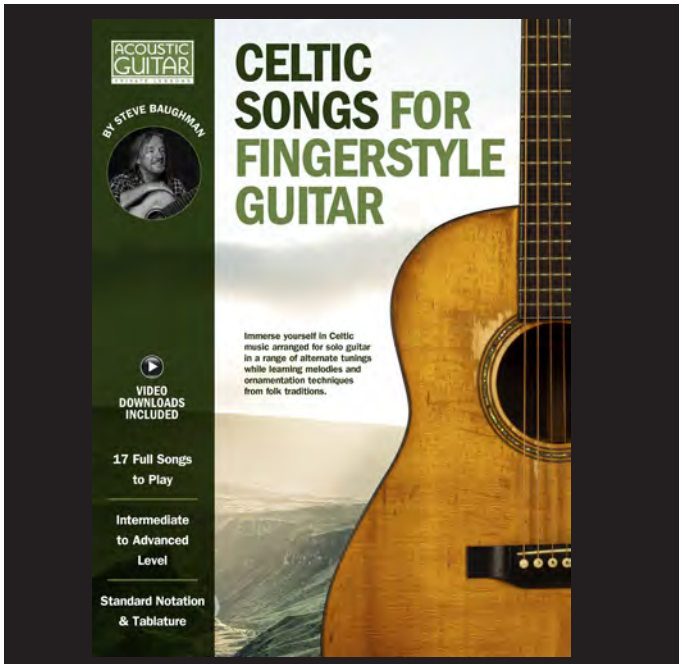

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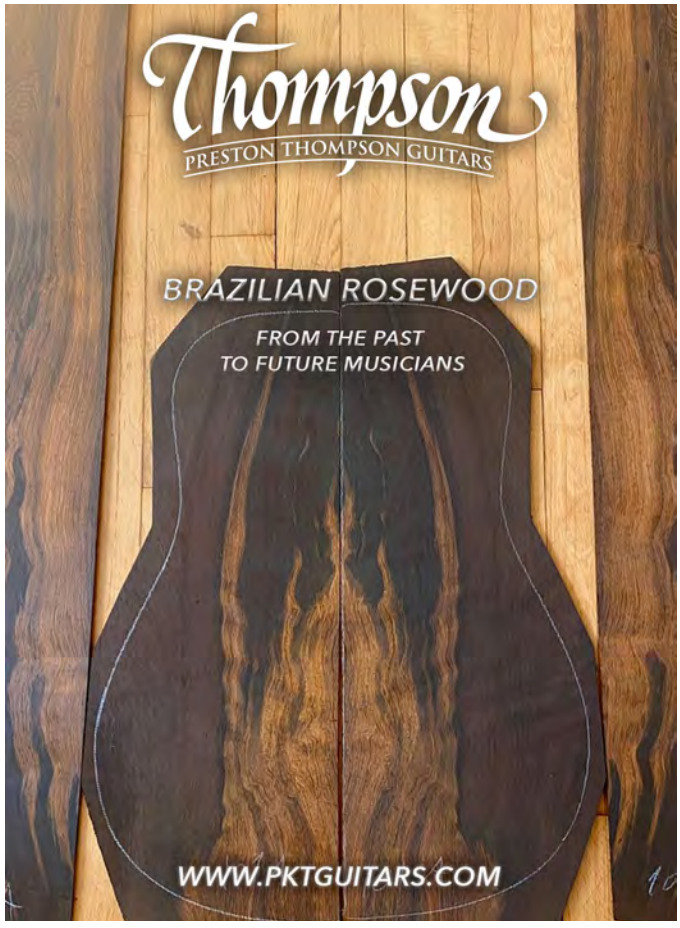


WATCH MARK SMALL PLAY THIS ARRANGEMENT OF "ESTRELLITA"
acousticguitar.com/tag/march-april-2021

Manuel Barrueco

STEPHEN SPARTANA

Estrellita

Manuel Barrueco's serene and introspective reading of Manuel Ponce's beloved song

BY MARK SMALL

Mexican composer Manuel Ponce (1882–1948) is best known to classical guitarists for the many works he penned for Andrés Segovia. Among them are four sonatas, 24 preludes, the monumental *Variations and Fugue on "La Folia,"* and *Concierto del Sur* (for guitar and orchestra). His most successful piece by far, however, is "Estrellita" ("Little Star"), a romantic song for which he wrote both music and lyrics in 1912. The tune is beloved throughout the Spanish-speaking world and has been hugely popular since the 1930s.

THE BACK STORY

"Estrellita" has been recorded more than 180 times in various settings. Among the most famous is the instrumental version created by violinist Jascha Heifetz (1901–1987). The story goes that Heifetz heard it sung in a Mexico City café in 1923 and notated the melody on a napkin. In his hotel room that night, he wrote an arrangement for piano and violin and played it the following night at his first concert in the capital city. Heifetz starred in the 1939 movie *They Shall Have Music* and appears in a scene playing the song. An internet search brings up big-band versions by clarinetist Benny Goodman and trumpeter Harry James, operatic treatments by Deanna Durbin and Spanish tenor Placido Domingo, among many others. Arrangements for string quartet, piano solo, cello and piano, and more abound. Famous virtuosi Joshua Bell and Itzhak Perlman are among the countless contemporary violinists who have recorded and performed it. Unfortunately, Ponce composed it before copyright laws were codified, and having passed away in 1948, he missed out on the royalties.

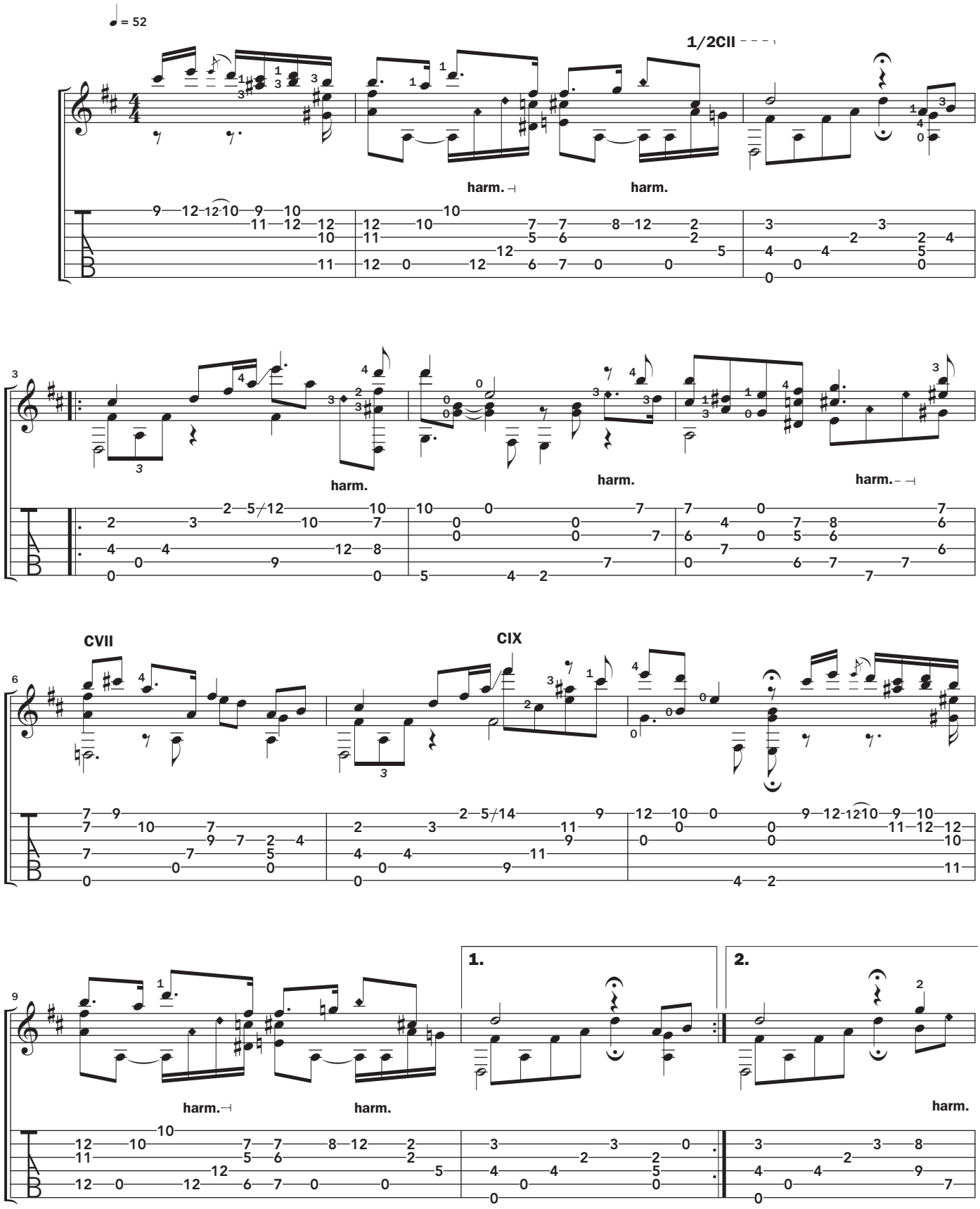
Guitarists arrived to the party a bit later. Manuel Barrueco included the version printed here on his 1997 album, *Cantos y Danzas*. "This is a very popular song," Barrueco says. "When I was growing up, I heard it all around. But it wasn't until later when I was studying the guitar that I learned Ponce had written it." Barrueco looked at Ponce's own solo guitar setting but decided against playing it.

Ponce's original piano/vocal score is in F major, Heifetz transposed it to F♯, and singers do it in a variety of keys. Barrueco plays it in D major, with his sixth string tuned to D. "I am really indebted to Mario Abril's arrangement," Barrueco states. "I started with that and began changing things." Notably, Barrueco used harmonics, primarily to add color to the accompaniment beneath the melody. But harmonics sound melody notes in the material heard in the first full bar and are repeated in bars 9 and 18.

BENEATH THE STARS

This tune basically follows a standard AABA song form. However, the bridge or B section (bars 12–15) and final recap of A (16–19) are each only four bars long, as in Ponce's original version. By contrast, the Heifetz arrangement extends the recap of the final A section and adds a coda, introducing considerable drama through reharmonization and having the violin

Tuning: D A D G B E



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soar into its high register in a classical fashion. The mood of the guitar arrangement is comparatively serene and introspective.

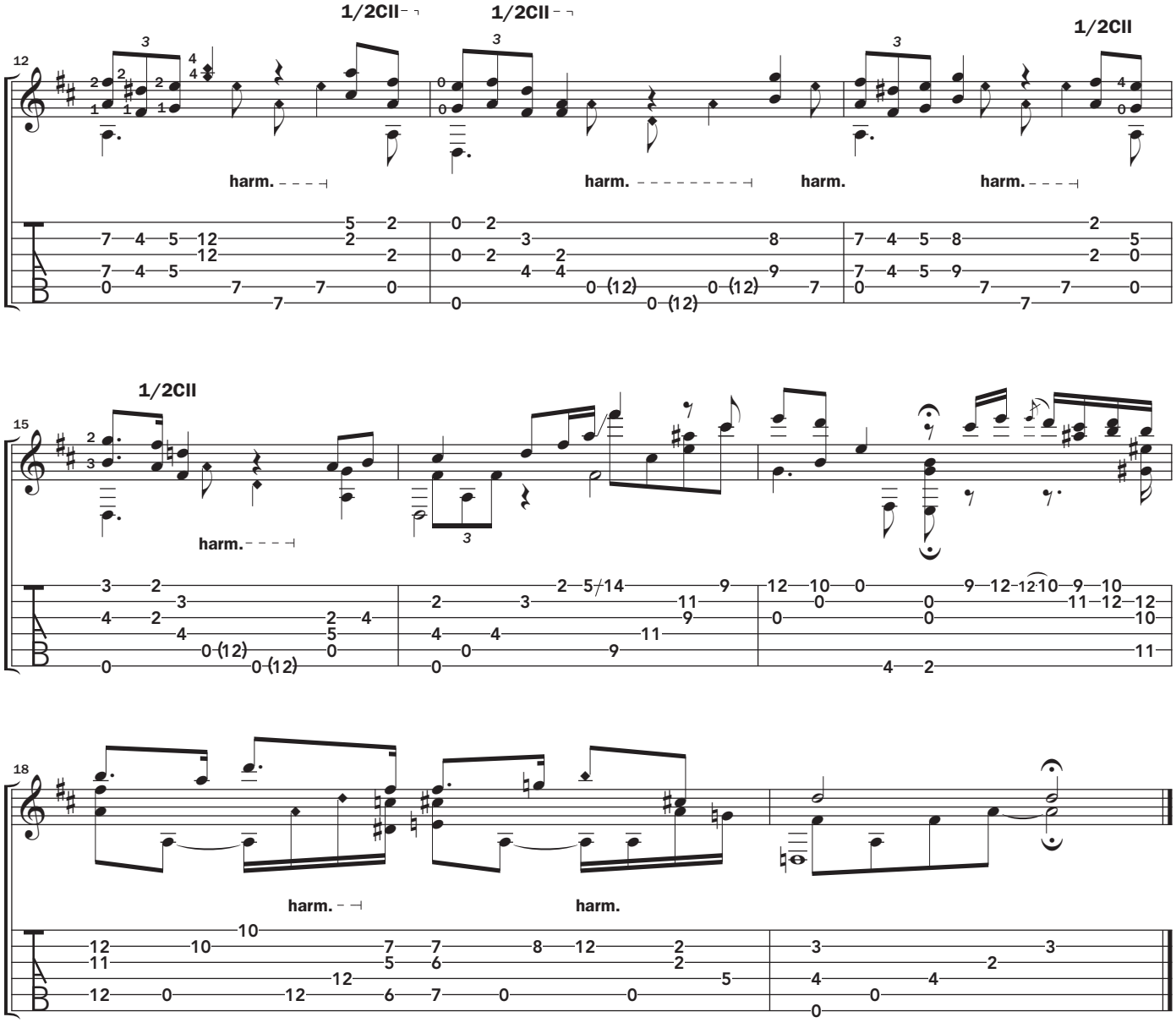
Starting from the top, after a couple bars of intro, we find the eight-bar A section (bars 3–10), which is played twice. Note that the intro material is derived from the last beat and a half of bar 8 through the first three beats of bar 10. The four-bar B section or bridge starts with the pickup notes to bar 12. The last beat of bar 15 is the pickup to the second half of the A section. The piece ends as it begins, with the material from the intro. So while this arrangement covers two pages, factor in repeated measures and there are only 12 bars of music to learn.

Harmonics occur while other notes sustain, and most are produced in the typical fashion, with a left-hand finger touching the string at the indicated node and the right-hand thumb picking. Those in bars 13 (except beat 4.5) and 15 are produced solely by the right hand. The index finger lightly touches the string at the 12th fret while the thumb plucks. (For more on this technique, see the Basics lesson in the February 2017 issue.)

In every occurrence of harmonics, sustain the fretted and open notes below for their full duration, to emphasize the independence between melody and accompaniment. Fret carefully in bar 3, to avoid muffling the D harmonic on beat four.

In his recorded version, wherever possible, Barrueco adds vibrato to the long melody notes. He brings some ebb and flow to his phrasing with subtle dynamic changes, alternately swelling and pulling back. He also makes effective use of *ritardando* in measures with a *fermata* (see bars 2, 8, 10, 11, 17, and 19).

The best classical interpreters fully utilize articulation, timbre and dynamic shading, tempo fluctuations, and lingering on poignant notes to enhance expression. I encourage steel-string players to give this piece a try as well. "Estrellita" has a folk-like simplicity, yet deep beauty resides within the melody and harmonies. Explore and craft your own interpretation with this in mind. AG



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Chordal Calisthenics

Building striking harmonies from the harmonic and melodic minor scales

BY RON JACKSON

Many acoustic guitarists spend the bulk of their time with the major and natural minor scales and their associated chords—the harmonic basis of so many popular styles, from folk to country to rock. For a higher level of sophistication, in this advanced lesson I'll introduce you to the melodic and harmonic minor scales and the harmonies that can be generated from them. These materials can provide not only interesting fretboard exercises but abundant color for your guitar arsenal. As you work through this lesson, keep in mind that the goal is to get these complex chords in your ears and under your fingers, so that they'll be available whenever you compose or improvise.

Ron Jackson

COURTESY OF RON JACKSON

WEEK ONE

To understand how the harmonic and melodic minor scales are constructed, first take the A natural minor scale (A B C D E F G). The A harmonic minor scale (A B C D E F G♯) is the same, except the seventh is raised, lending a somewhat mysterious character. Both the sixth and seventh are raised in the ascending form of A melodic minor (A B C D E F♯ G♯), but in the descending form, those two notes are lowered (i.e., identical to the natural minor scale). In this lesson, we'll be focusing only on the ascending form of the melodic minor scale.

Example 1 shows the A harmonic minor scale played in two octaves, starting on the fifth-fret A. Play this slowly and repeatedly, until you get accustomed to the way it sounds and feels. Use whatever fingerings feel most natural to you. Then, as a precursor to playing chords from within the A harmonic minor scale, try **Example 2**, in which the scale is harmonized in thirds—again, slowly so that you can really get a feel for things.

Beginners' Tip #1

After you've learned the A harmonic and melodic minor scales, try playing them in other keys as well.

Repeat the same ideas with the ascending A melodic minor scale, as shown in **Examples 3–4**. Though the A harmonic and melodic minor scales share all but one note in common, they impart noticeably different moods. After you've worked through this week's examples, if you have a good knowledge of the fretboard, try playing the scales and harmonized thirds in other positions as well, and feel free to transpose them—for instance, just move everything up two frets to play the B harmonic and melodic minor scales, three frets for C harmonic and melodic minor, and so on.

WEEK TWO

This week you'll start expressing the A harmonic and melodic minor scales in triads, all using closed voicings. You can do this by stacking two thirds from within the scale on top of each note, as shown in **Example 5**. If you struggle to play these chords—in particular, the Bdim on the "and" of beat one requires a pretty big stretch of the fretting fingers—don't worry. The point of this exercise is so that you can see how the chords are built and get accustomed to their sounds. **Example 6** contains the same triads, but played as eighth-note triplets, for a good fretboard workout.

Now play the A melodic minor scale's triads, first as block chords (**Example 7**) and then in arpeggios (**Example 8**). Note that the A harmonic and melodic minor scales share four of the same triads—Am, Caug, E, and G♯dim. Compare the differences in the others: For example, A harmonic minor contains a Bdim chord, while A melodic minor has Bm. Just as you did last week, if you're up for it, play these arpeggios and chords in other spots on the fretboard, possibly transposed to other root notes as well.

WEEK THREE

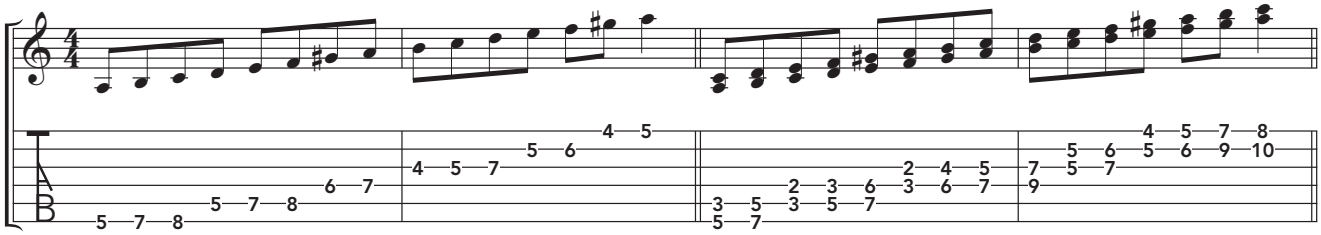
Things gets interesting this week, harmonically speaking, as seventh chords come into play. **Example 9** shows all of the seventh chords in root position within the A harmonic minor scale, starting off with the colorful Am(maj7)—an Am triad (A C E) with a major seventh (G♯). In **Example 10a**, these chords are presented in guitar-friendly block chord voicings. After you've gotten a feel for these chords, try playing them in different orders and in varied rhythms and grooves—see, for

Beginners' Tip #2

When learning harmonies generated from the harmonic and melodic minor scales, play them both as block chords and arpeggios.

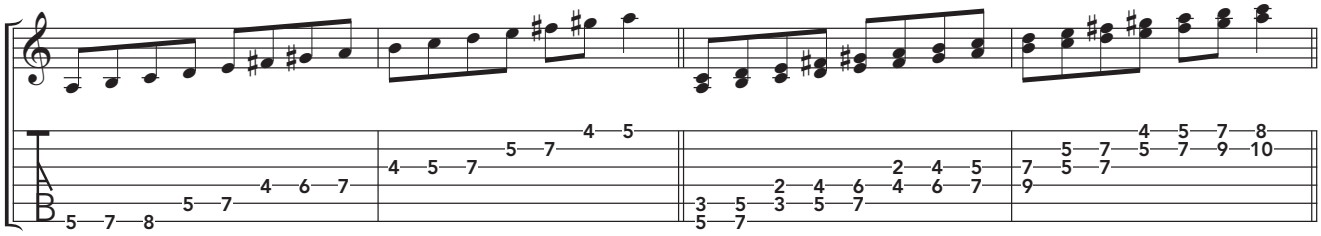
WEEK 1

Example 1



Example 2

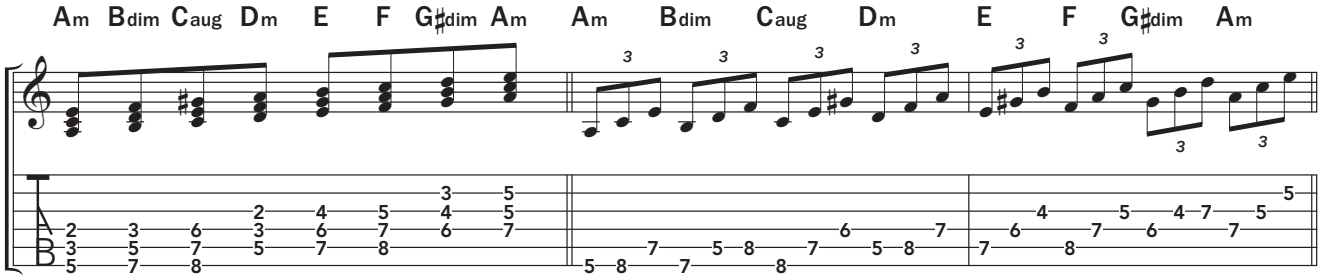
Example 3



Example 4

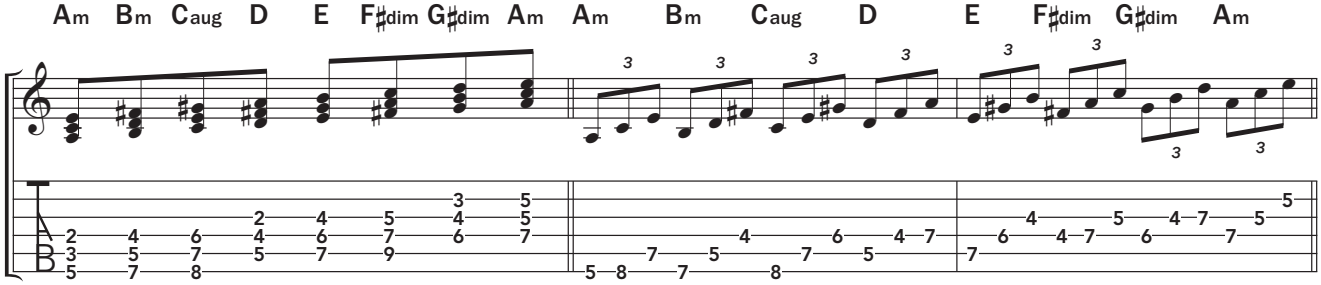
WEEK 2

Example 5



Example 6

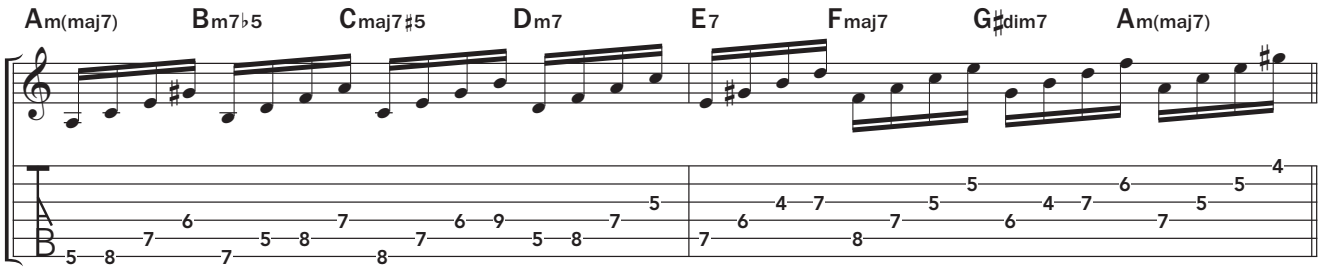
Example 7



Example 8

WEEK 3

Example 9



instance, **Example 10b**, which uses four of the chords in a jazzy vamp.

Now take the same steps, but with the A melodic minor scale, starting with the root-position arpeggios (**Example 11**), followed by the block chords (**Example 12a**). Just as you did with the triads in the previous week, notice which chords are shared between the A harmonic and melodic minor scales, and which are different. Both scales include Am(maj7), for example, but while A harmonic minor contains Bm7♭5, its melodic minor counterpart includes Bm7. Then, have fun playing around with the chords. **Example 12b** shows just one possibility—rolling arpeggios between the Am(maj7) and G♯m7♭5 chords.

WEEK FOUR

This week you'll be applying this lesson's concepts to a ten-bar D minor blues (**Example 13**), with chords drawn from D melodic minor (D E F G A B C♯, bar 1, etc.) and D harmonic minor (D E F G A B♭ C♯, bar 3, etc.), as well as G harmonic minor (G A B♭ C D E♭ F♯, bar 2, etc.) and G melodic minor (G A B♭ C D E F♯) bars 4–5, etc.).

Play through this example slowly, using as little motion as possible when switching between the chord shapes. Be sure to listen deeply to their unusual sounds, which might take some time for your ears to get accustomed to—this is not your father's blues! After you've worked through the entire lesson, keep playing around with deriving chords from harmonic and melodic minor scales, or any others. Not only is this a good workout for your fingers and ears, it can provide you with fresh chords for spicing up your music.

Ron Jackson is a New York–based master jazz guitarist, composer, arranger, producer, and educator who's played with Taj Mahal, Jimmy McGriff, Randy Weston, Ron Carter, and others. ronjacksonmusic.com

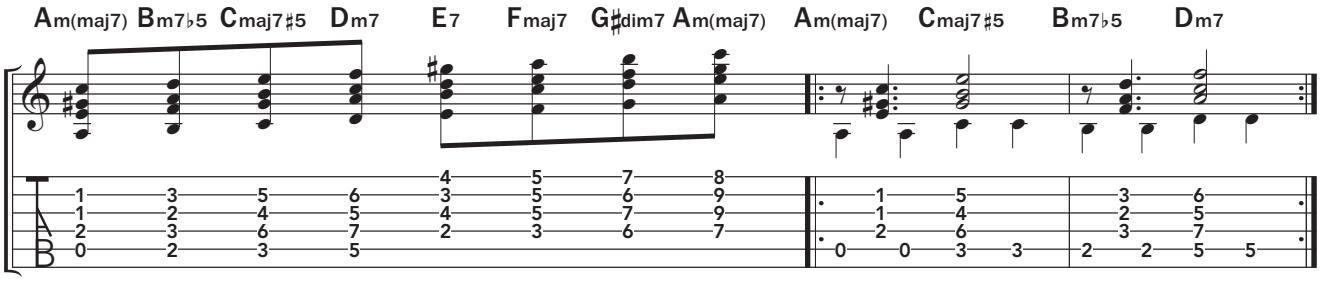
Beginners' Tip #3

Once you've learned the chords in this lesson, visualize other voicings on the fretboard and make them a part of your harmonic vocabulary.

Beginners' Tip #4

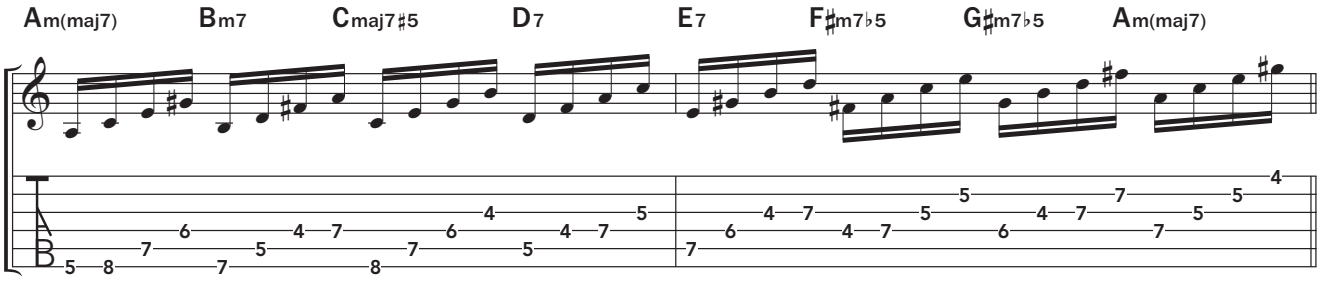
Whether you're composing or improvising, try using the harmonic or melodic minor scale, instead of natural minor or minor pentatonic, for refreshing new sounds and ideas.

Example 10a

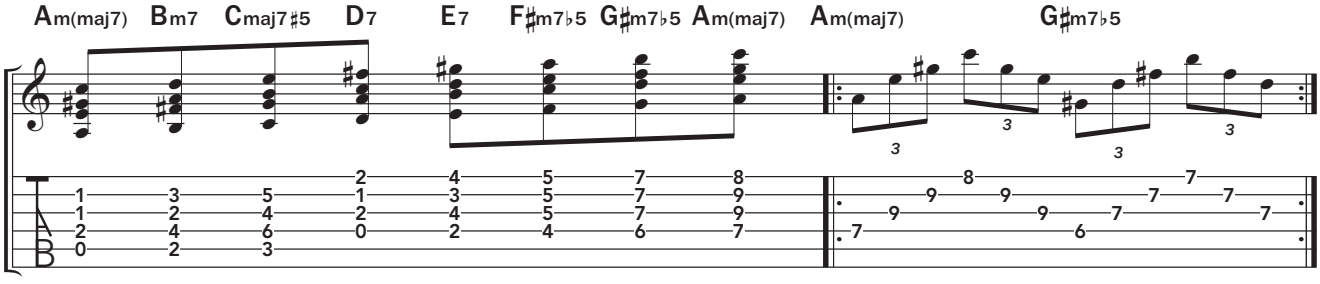


Example 10b

Example 11



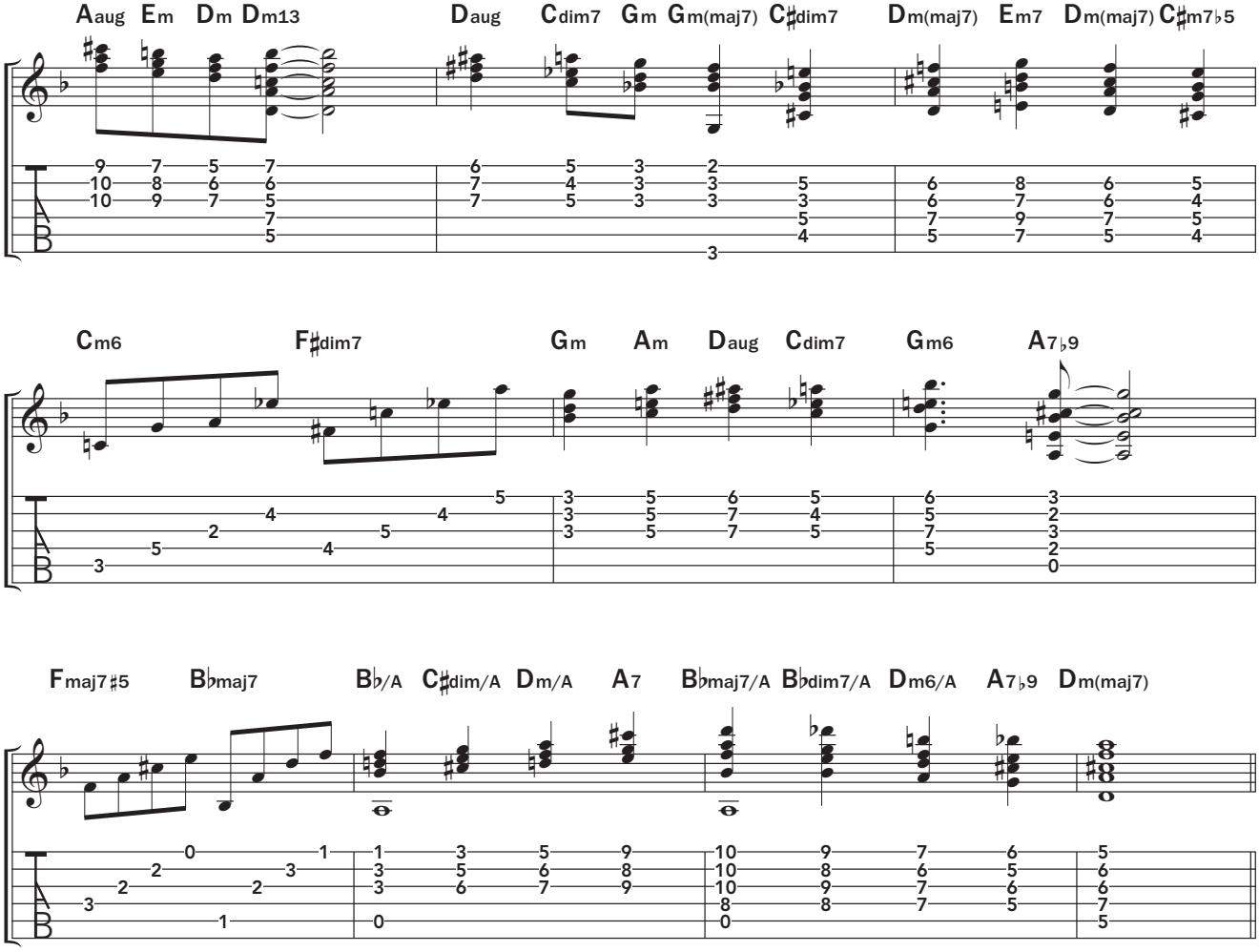
Example 12a



Example 12b

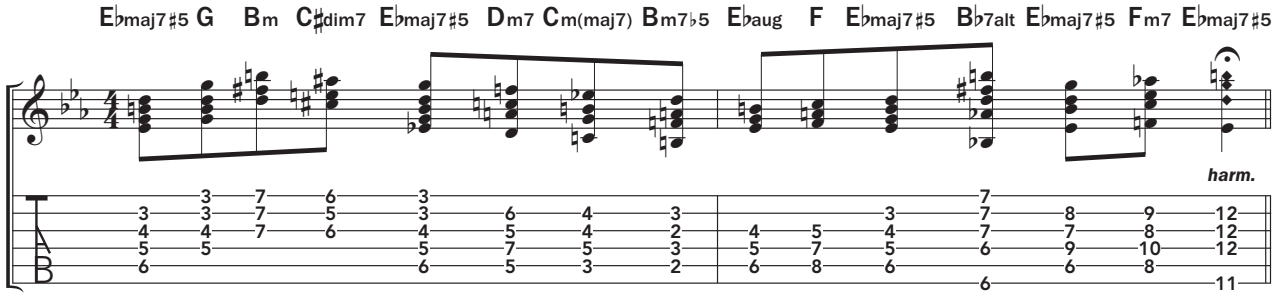
WEEK 4

Example 13



TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Try this finger-busting, ear-bending exercise, in which chords are derived from the C melodic minor (C D E♭ F G A B), B melodic minor (B C♯ D E F♯ G♯ A♯ B), and C harmonic minor scales (C D E♭ F G A♭ B C). For extra credit, see if you can identify the parent scale for each chord; for instance, E♭maj7♯5 comes from C melodic minor.



Jerry Jeff Walker

Mr. Bojangles

Jerry Jeff Walker's classic ode to a colorful New Orleans character

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

When outlaw country singer-songwriter Jerry Jeff Walker died last October at 78, he left behind a rich body of work, comprising more than 30 albums. But the only song of his to become a major hit was "Mr. Bojangles," which he first recorded for the Atco label in 1968. Inspired by a destitute elderly street performer that Walker met in a New Orleans drunk tank, the tune became a pop standard, recorded by John Denver, Bob Dylan, Whitney Houston, and others, not to mention a staple of Sammy Davis Jr.'s stage shows.

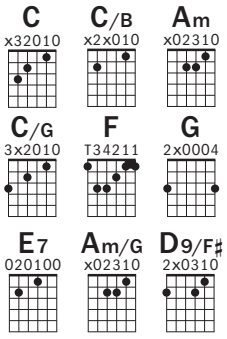
This arrangement is based on Walker's 1968 single (as opposed to the longer album version) in terms of structure, with chord voicings gleaned from a live solo performance on YouTube. Walker played the song with a capo at the second fret, causing it to sound in the key of D major. The intro marks the first appearance of a chord progression with a neatly descending bass line—C–C/B–Am–C/G—that recurs in the first part of each verse as well as the end of the chorus. Try the figure shown in the notation, which is transcribed from the single. Add a bit of emphasis to the first beat of each measure, and strum in a down-up motion on the other beats—an accompaniment pattern that will service the entire song.

Note that each verse ends with four measures of a G chord. You could stay on the basic open G shape for the duration, but instead I'd recommend playing a G–G6–G7–G6 progression, as shown in the notation. Forming the basic G chord with your second (or third) finger on string 6 and your fourth on string 1 will free your other fingers to play the sixth (second-fret E) and flatted seventh (third-fret F)—a good move to have up your sleeve for adding interest to a harmonically static passage. AG

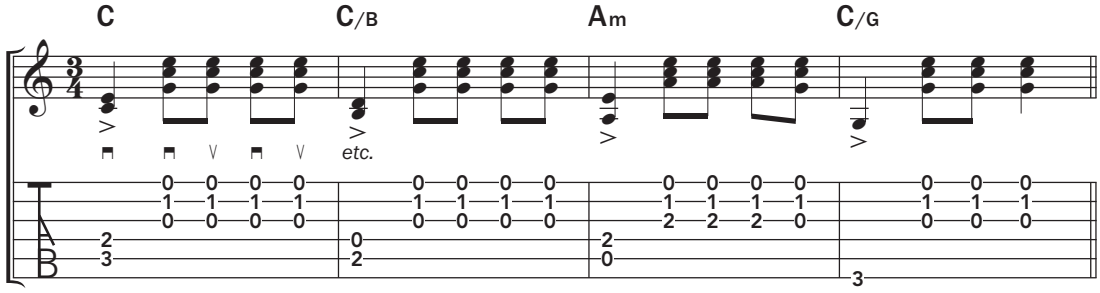
MR. BOJANGLES

WORDS AND MUSIC BY JERRY JEFF WALKER

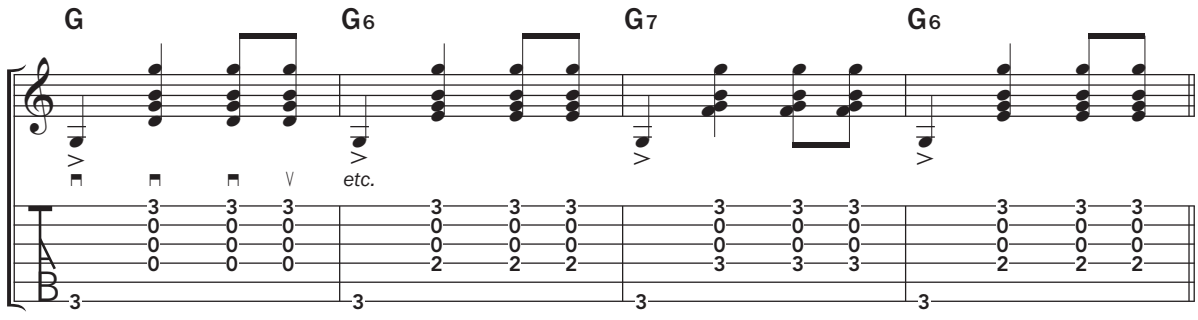
Chords, Capo II



Intro



Harmonic Embellishments



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Intro

C C/B Am C/G

C C/B Am C/G
1. I knew a man Bojangles and he'd dance for you

F G
In worn-out shoes

C C/B Am C/G
With silver hair, a ragged shirt, and baggy pants

F G
The old soft shoe

F C E7
He jumped so high

Am Am/G
Jumped so high

D9/F♯ G
Then he'd lightly touch down

Chorus

Am G
Mr. Bojangles

Am G
Mr. Bojangles

Am G
Mr. Bojangles

C C/B Am C/G
Dance

C C/B Am C/G
2. I met him in a cell in New Orleans I was

F G
Down and out

C C/B Am C/G
He looked to me to be the eyes of age

F G
As he spoke right out

F C E7
He talked of life

Am Am/G
He talked of life

D9/F♯ G
He laughed, slapped his leg a step

C C/B Am C/G
3. He said the name Bojangles and he danced a lick

F G
Across the cell

C C/B Am C/G
He grabbed his pants for a better stance, whoa, he jumped high

F G
He clicked his heels

F C
He let go a laugh

E7 Am Am/G
He let go a laugh

D9/F♯ G
Shook back his clothes all around

Repeat Chorus

C C/B Am C/G
4. He danced for those at minstrel shows and county fairs

F G
Throughout the South

C C/B Am C/G
He spoke in tears of 15 years and how his dog and him

F G
They travelled about

F C
His dog up and died

E7 Am Am/G
He up and died

D9/F♯ G
After 20 years he still grieves

C C/B Am C/G
5. He said I dance now at every chance in honky tonks

F G
For drinks and tips

C C/B Am C/G
But most the time I spend behind these county bars

F G
'Cause I drinks a bit

F C E7 Am Am/G
He shook his head and as he shook his head

D9/F♯ G
I heard someone ask please

WORLD PREMIERE

HEAR "GREAT DEPRESSION BLUES"
acousticguitar.com/tag/march-april-2021

Great Depression Blues

An unearthed gem by American Primitive guitarist Robbie Basho

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

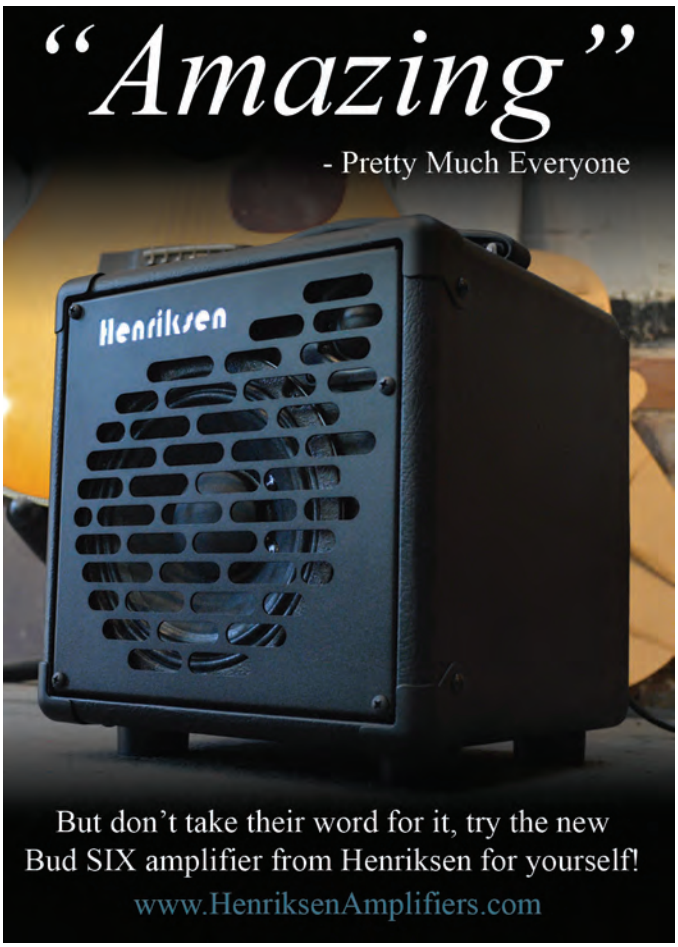
The new five-CD box set *Song of the Avatars: The Lost Master Tapes* is a treasure trove of more than 100 tracks spanning Robbie Basho's recording career and covering the far-flung styles from which the guitar icon (see feature on page 22) borrowed—Indian classical, Persian, and Native American, among others. "Great Depression Blues" is one of the most accessible selections in the set, and a showcase for Basho's considerable fingerpicking technique.

The guitarist played "Great Depression Blues" in the key of A minor, with a capo at the third fret transposing it up to the key of C minor. The piece is bookended by free-time (without strict rhythms) improvisations in bars 1–15 and 82–98, centered on basic open chord shapes. For these sections, I'd recommend trying your own solos rather than learning the music exactly as notated. Just be sure to end the second solo on an A major chord—a technique, known as a Picardy third, in which the I major chord is used at the end of a minor-key piece.

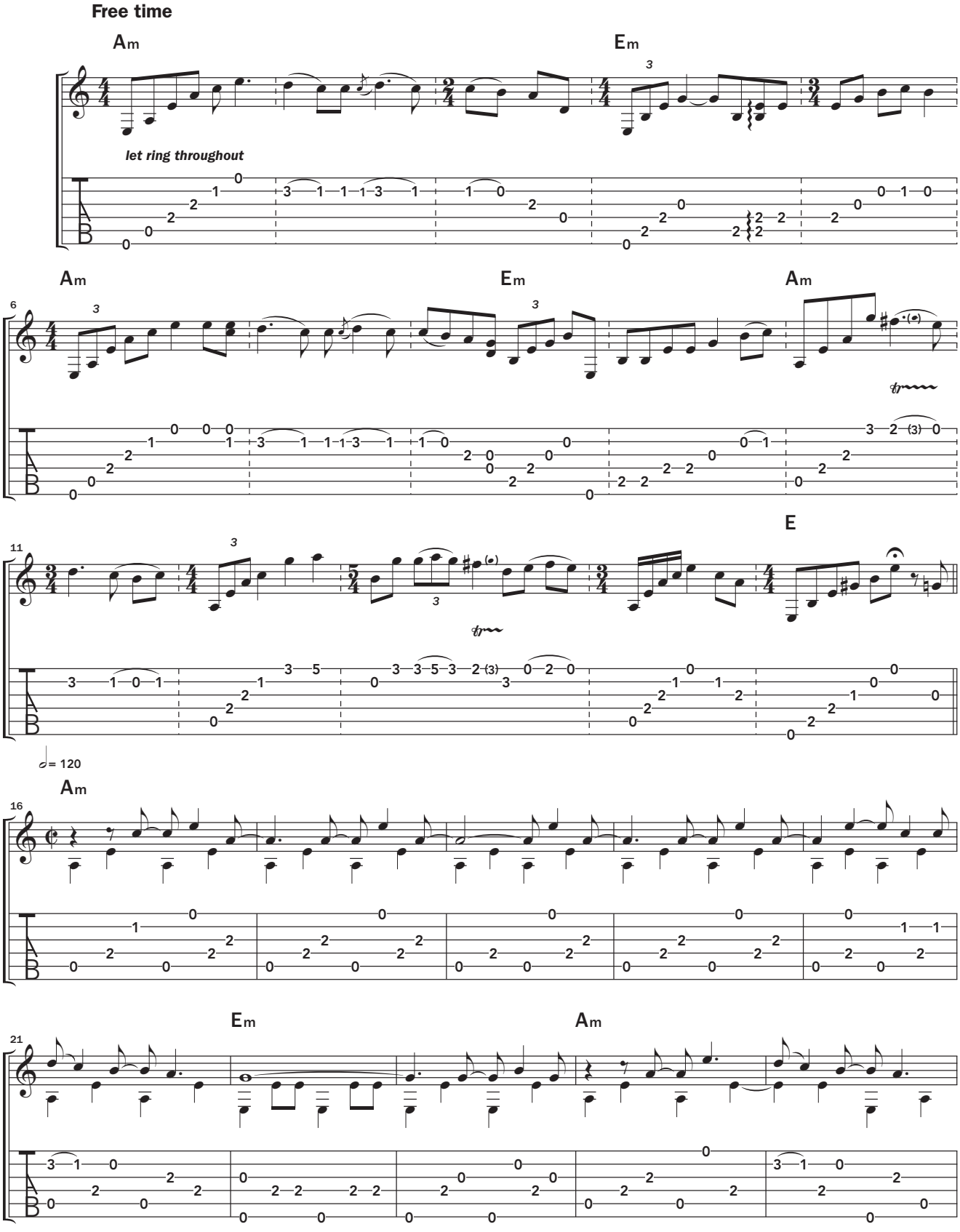
The interior section (bars 16–81)—the bulk of the piece—is played with Travis picking, in which the thumb picks bass notes squarely on the downbeats and the other fingers add syncopated melodies above. Heads up on the deviations from straight Travis picking—for instance, the double-picked Es in bars 22, 26, 33, 36, and 53, and other disruptions to the quarter-note bass pulse—like the tied-to open D at the beginning of bar 31.

Given its racing tempo, learn "Great Depression Blues" systematically, isolating any trouble spots, like perhaps the handful of hammer-ons starting in bar 37, and focus on playing everything with rhythmic crispness and precision. This piece is a good reminder that in order to play something fast, you can benefit from first approaching it slowly.

For more instruction on Robbie Basho, see "Mood Music" in the May 2017 issue.



Capo III



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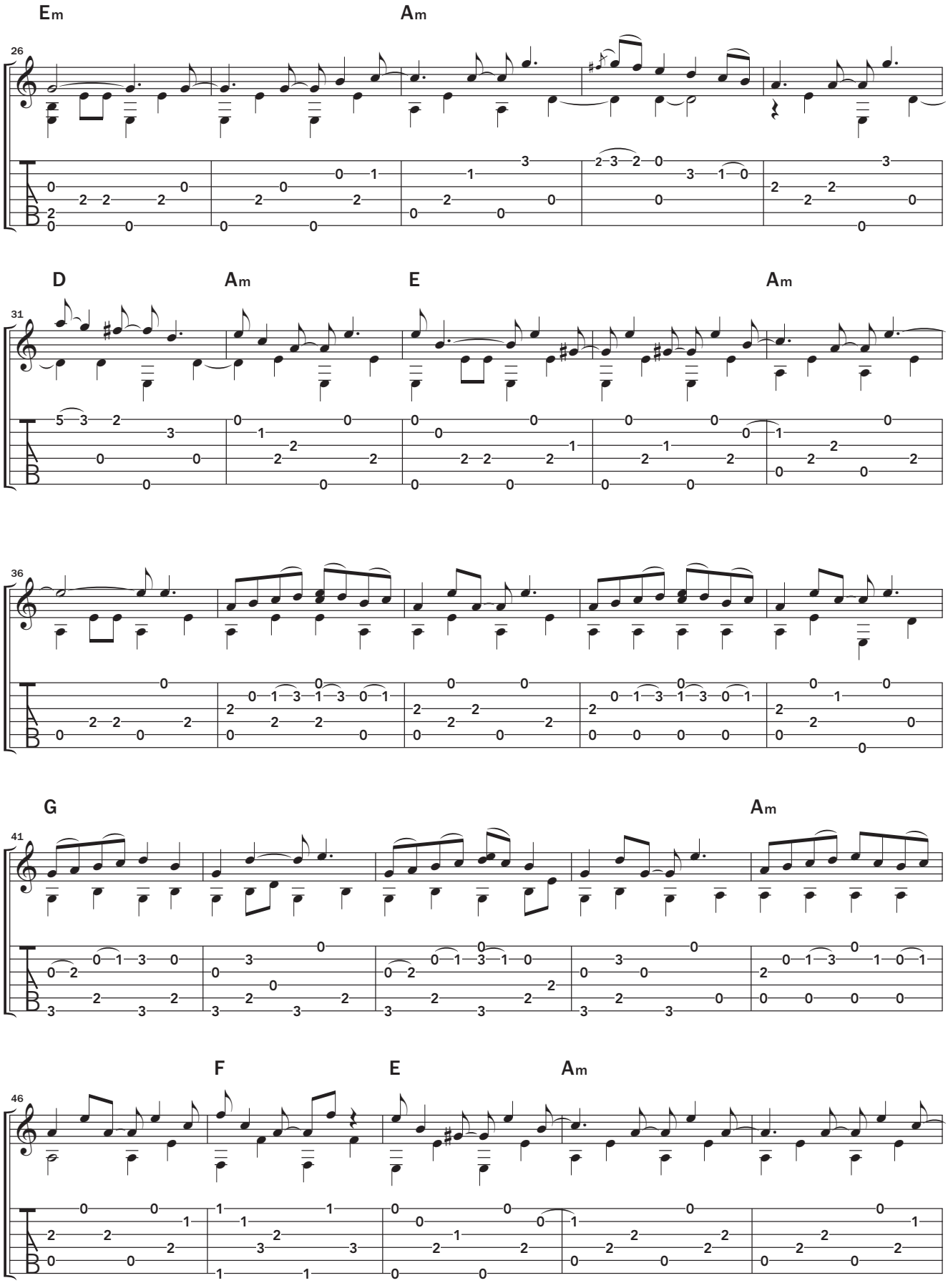

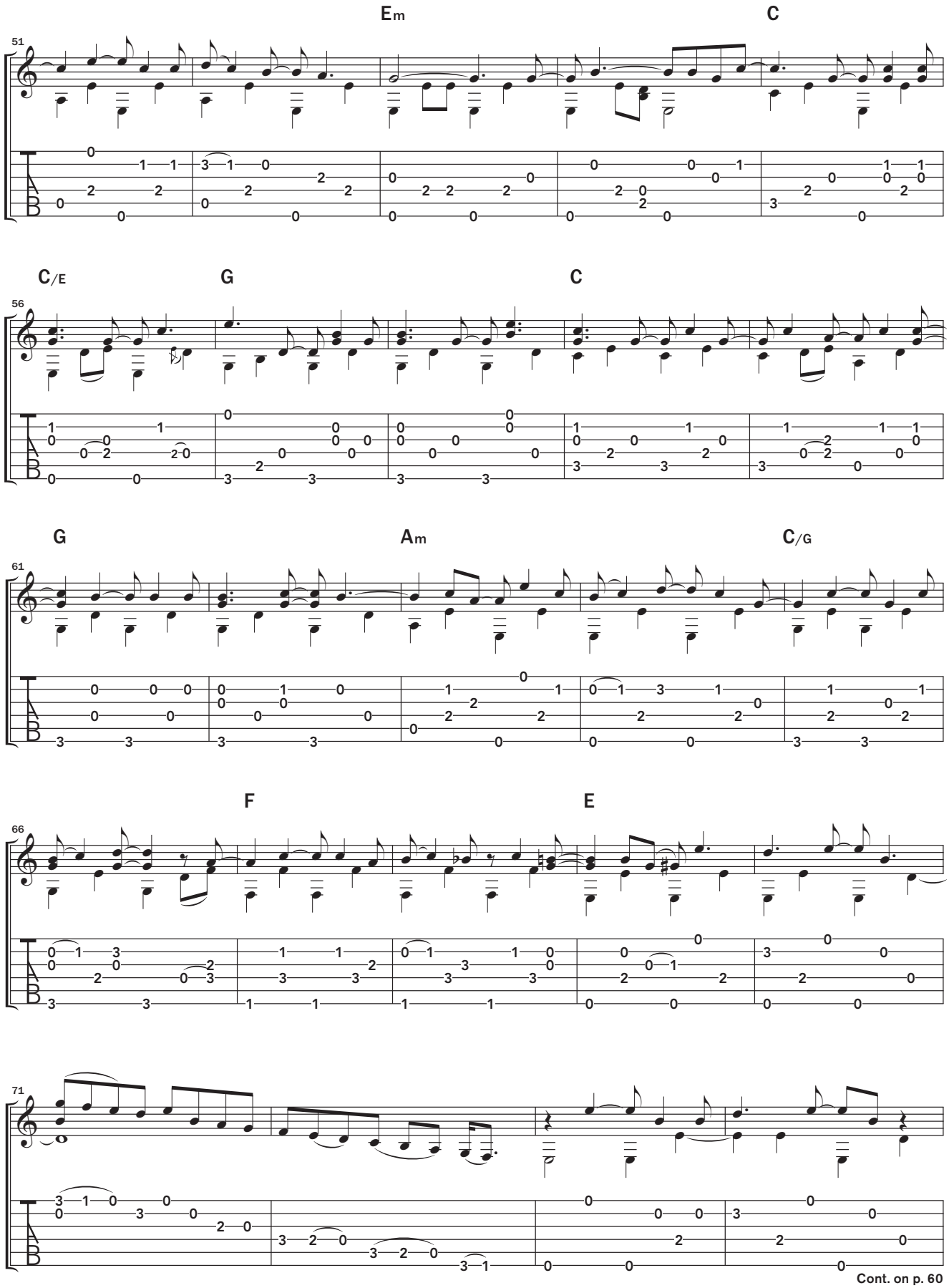

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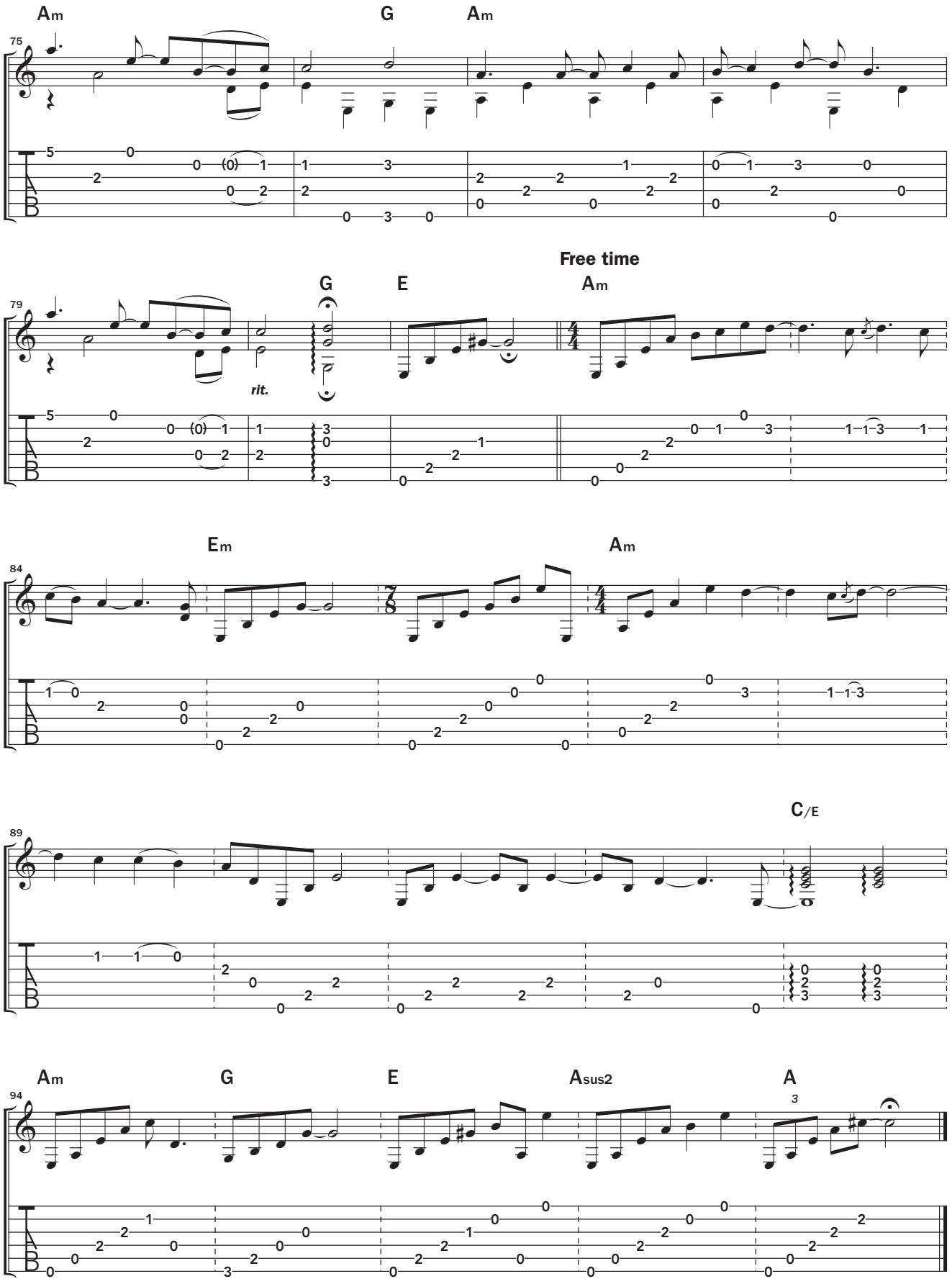

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ALAN BARNOSKY DEMONSTRATES "SALLY ANN"
acousticguitar.com/tag/march-april-2021

Alan Barnosky

Dudley Hill

ALAN BARNOSKY: ROSS LANGDON PAGE; DUDLEY HILL: COURTESY OF DJANGOBOOKS.COM

Sally Ann

A beautiful open-G arrangement by an underappreciated bluegrass and jazz guitarist

BY ALAN BARNOSKY

Browsing a local North Carolina record shop a few years ago, I came across an intriguing used LP. It had a worn cover, hand-drawn artwork, and text in a top corner that read DUDLEY HILL—GUITAR. I brought it home and immediately became hooked. The playing was warm, melodic, and thoughtful. It did not show off flashy guitar licks or fingerboard acrobatics, just joyful and effortless musicianship. This was an extraordinary player I had never heard of and an out-of-print record released by a small Seattle label, so I started to do a bit of digging.

Largely unknown outside of his home region, Dudley Hill was a beloved guitarist in the Pacific Northwest. Scott Nygaard, a former editor of *AG* who knew Hill through the Seattle music scene, told me that "he was one of the best guitarists I've known" and that "his rhythm and time were perfect." In an obituary, Hill's bandmate Rick Leppanen offered high praise: "There were many nights when he would play something that I'd heard so many times before, but he'd just play it so perfectly that it made you smile." I was able to reach Ellen Marx, who played banjo with Hill, and she said that when she played with him "they never struggled to make something work, it just always naturally fit."

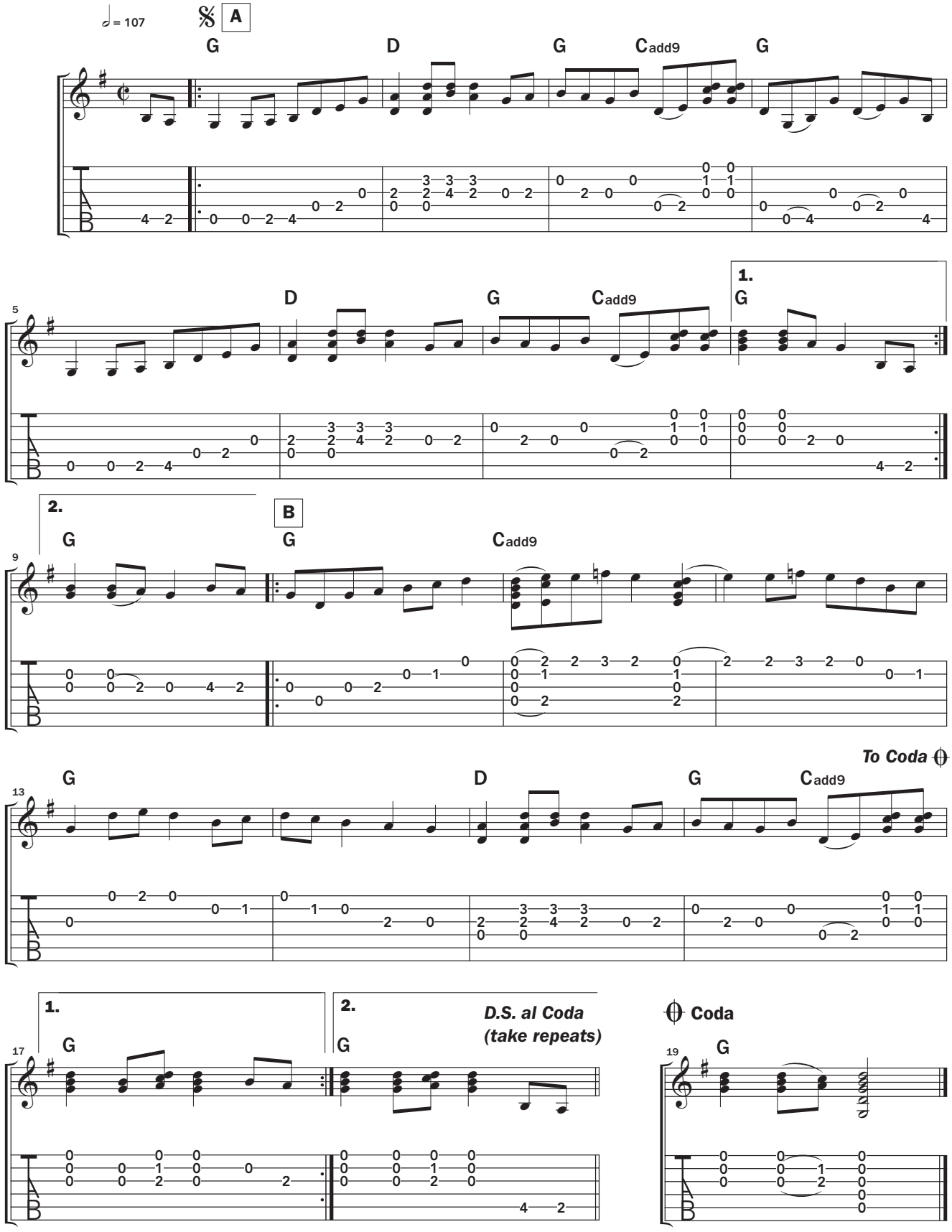
Hill was born in Tacoma, Washington, in 1948, and mastered guitar at a young age. He joined the Navy during the Vietnam War, and upon returning home he got into traditional music and competed in flatpicking contests. In 1976, Hill released the aforementioned album, *From a Northern Family*. He worked full-time at a sawmill during the day and performed with rock and blues groups at night. He also accompanied the respected Texas fiddler Benny Thomasson, and in the '90s formed the internationally known Gypsy-jazz group Pearl Django. All accounts I found describe Hill as quiet, humble, and kind. After a difficult battle with cancer, he died in 2005, at the age of 56.

From a Northern Family is a fantastic record, filled with excellent guitar work. It was recorded live in a living room, with each track captured in just one or two takes. The album is on YouTube, and I urge all readers to give it a listen. Hill recorded "Sally Ann" (which starts at 19:13 on the YouTube video) as a duet with Marx on clawhammer banjo, and the unison lines between the two instruments form an unconventionally perfect pairing.

Hill plays this arrangement in the key of G major using open-G tuning (D G D G B D), with a capo at the third fret. My guess is that he used the capo—which transposes the key to B♭—to add some crispness in an otherwise somewhat jangly-sounding tuning. While open tunings are typically reserved for slide and fingerstyle players, they can work really well for fiddle tunes, and this version of the traditional number "Sally Ann" serves as a great example. Key to mastering it is to focus on open-string drones and first-position chord voicings, letting notes ring and bleed as much as possible, and to never lose sight of the melody. See the accompanying video lesson for tips on the arrangement and specific ideas on getting comfortable in this tuning.

I have no idea how this album released on a small Washington label reached me in North Carolina, but I'm glad it did. Dudley Hill is a treasure, and while I am sad to learn his life was cut tragically short, I am grateful that his humble musical mastery lives on through this rare find. AG

Tuning: D G D G B D, Capo III



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Ragtime Cowboy Joe

Echoes of the American West in a cheerfully enduring song

BY KATE KOENIG

Maurice Tani

Back in 1912, when ragtime was still a part of the musical zeitgeist, the second best-selling song of the year was "Ragtime Cowboy Joe," a bouncy Western tune recorded by Bob Roberts. Telling a whimsical tale of a cowboy who sings ragtime music to his herd, the song's lyrics were written by Grant Clarke and the music was composed by Lewis F. Muir and Maurice Abrahams—who in fact had no meaningful experience with the West.

The song is naturally a playful one, as it was inspired by the sight of Abrahams' four-year-old Brooklyn nephew dressed up in a cowboy costume. Born into pop culture, "Ragtime Cowboy Joe" persisted in different iterations throughout the 20th century. Perhaps its most famous cover is the 1959 single by the fictitious Chipmunks of children's television fame. It's also been adopted as a fight song by the University of Wyoming and the University of California, Davis.

"Ragtime Cowboy Joe" is a bit more sophisticated than the other songs in this series. It has a longer form and uses more chords—eight in all—F, Dm, G7, C7, C, Am, E, and A7. But the chords fall in straightforward cowboy territory. On the video on *AG*'s website, Maurice Tani forms the F by wrapping his thumb around to fret the sixth-string F. You might find this shape easier to play than the traditional fingering, with the first finger barring across all six frets; go with whatever works best for you.

As for the picking hand, Tani plays the song with a classic boom-chuck pattern—bass notes on beats one and three and strums on two and four—which I recommend you try before delving into the song. Note that though boom-chuck is generally played with a pick, Tani opts to do it fingerstyle, which proves just as effective in capturing the good old spirited tune that is "Ragtime Cowboy Joe." AG

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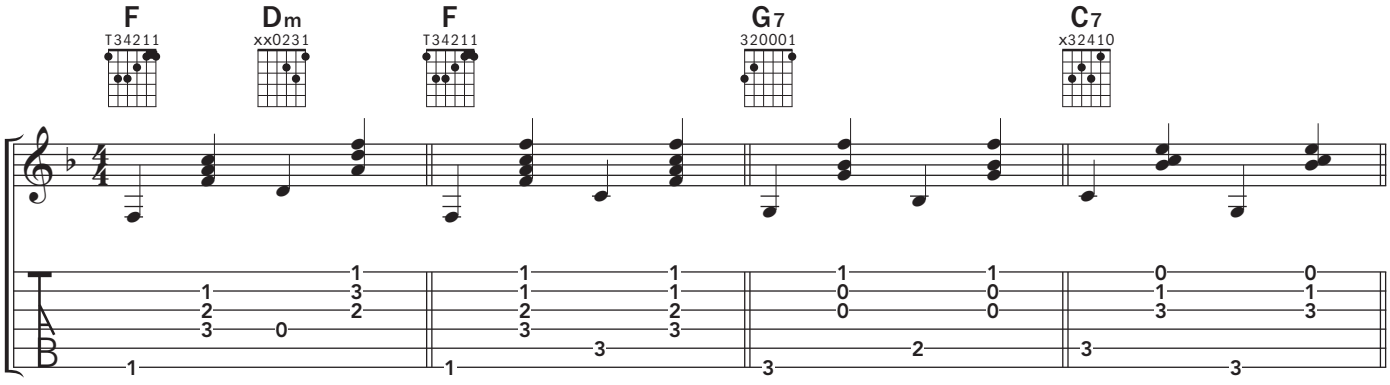
RAGTIME COWBOY JOE

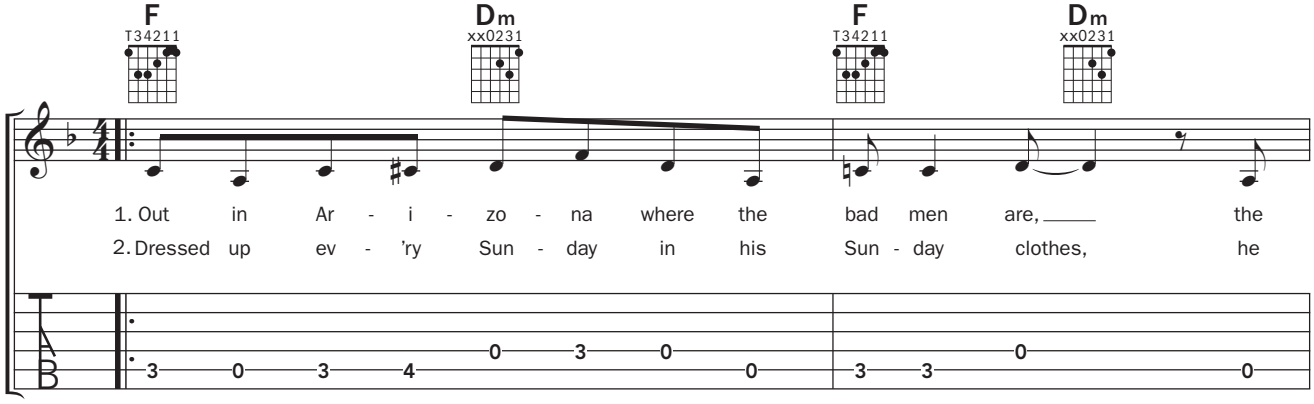
LYRICS BY GRANT CLARKE, MUSIC BY LEWIS F. MUIR AND MAURICE ABRAHAMS

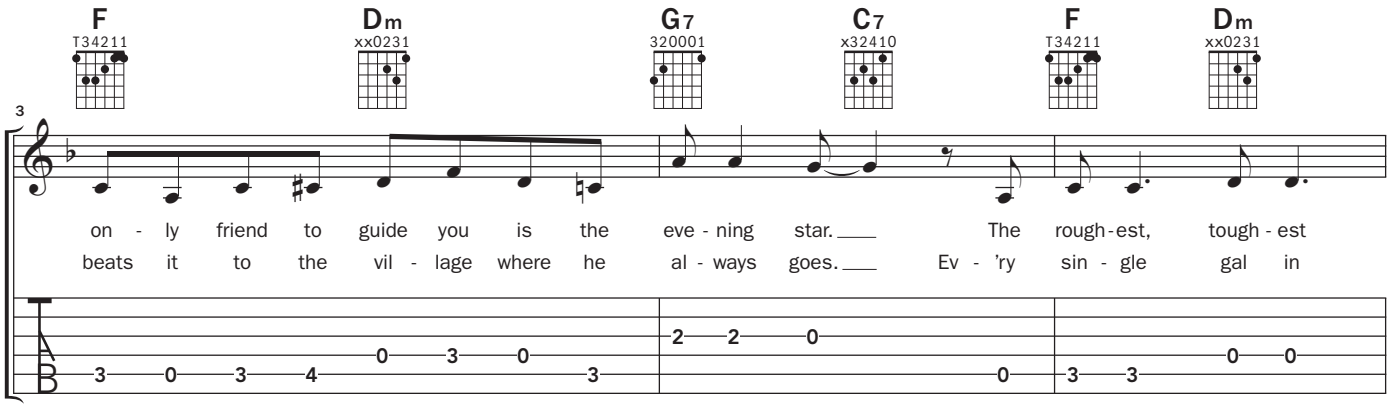
Accompaniment Patterns



Verse

Bouncy





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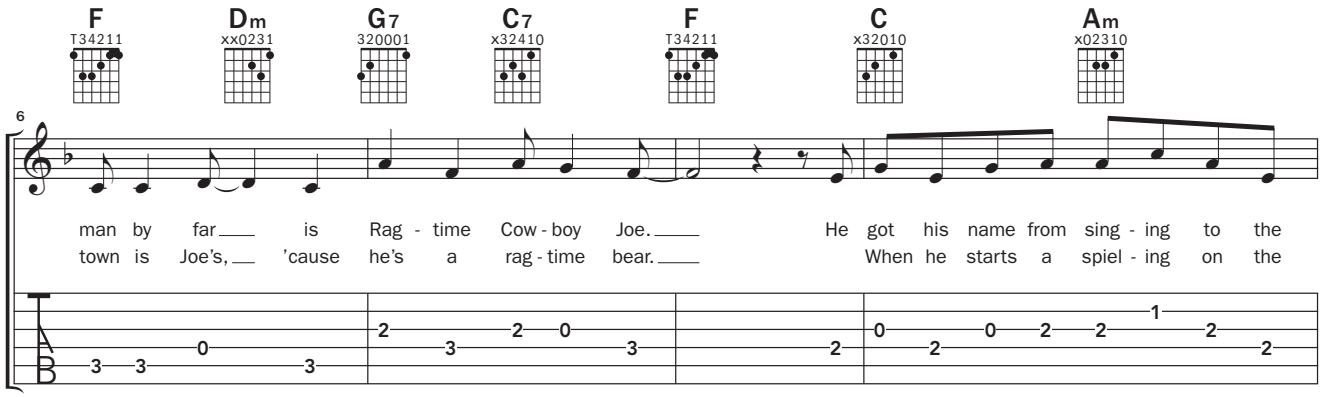
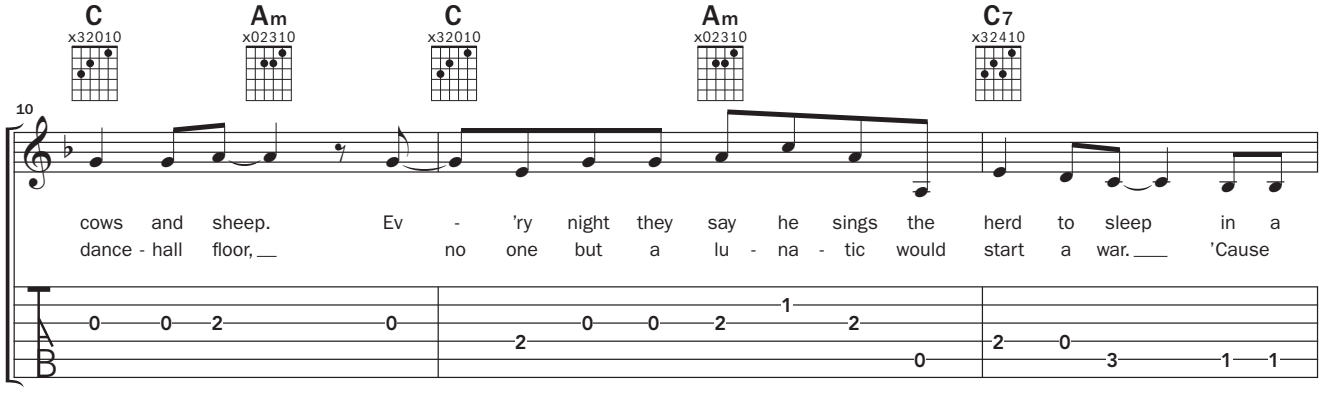
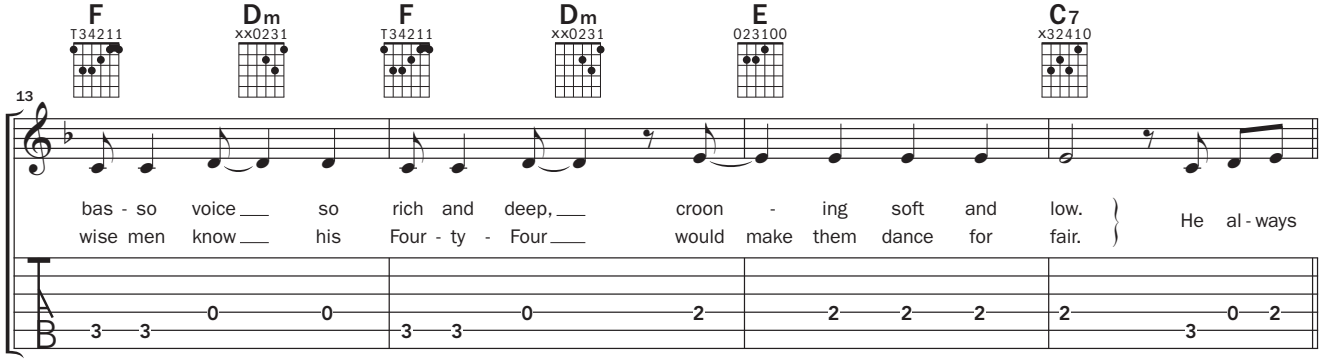
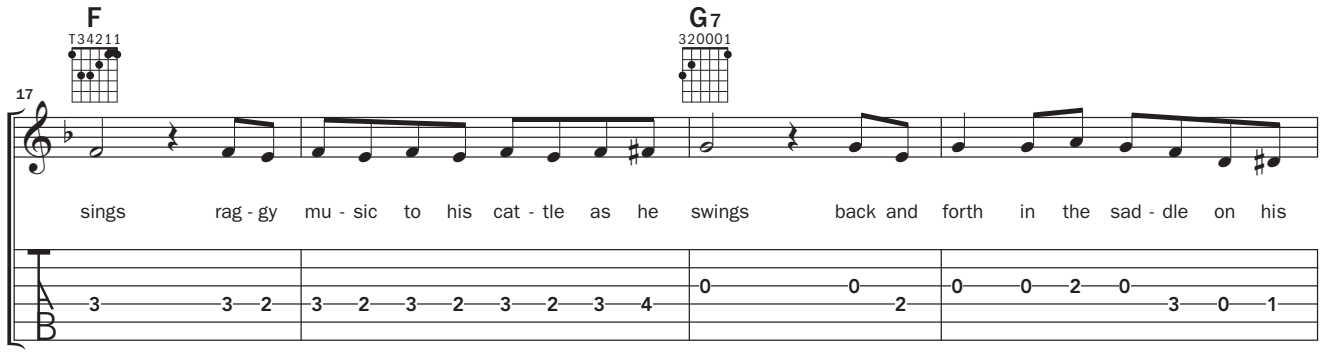
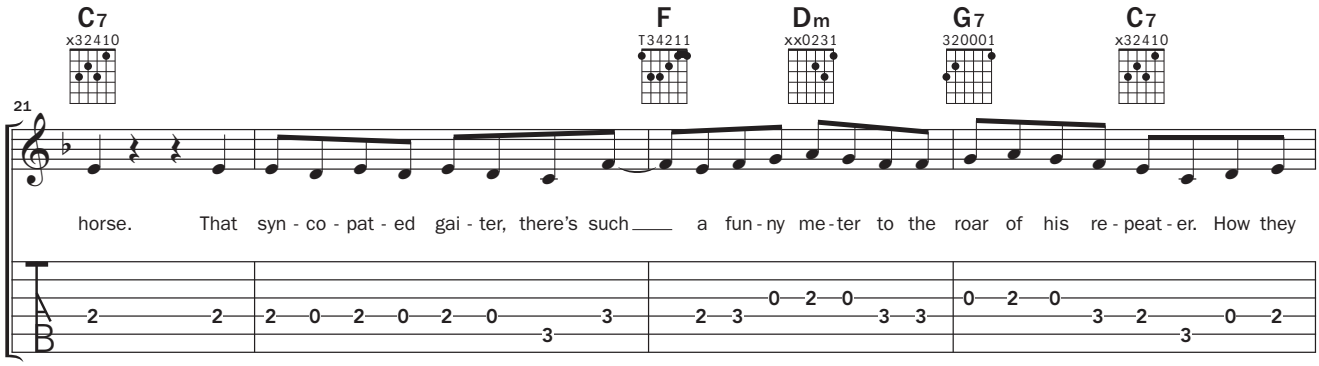


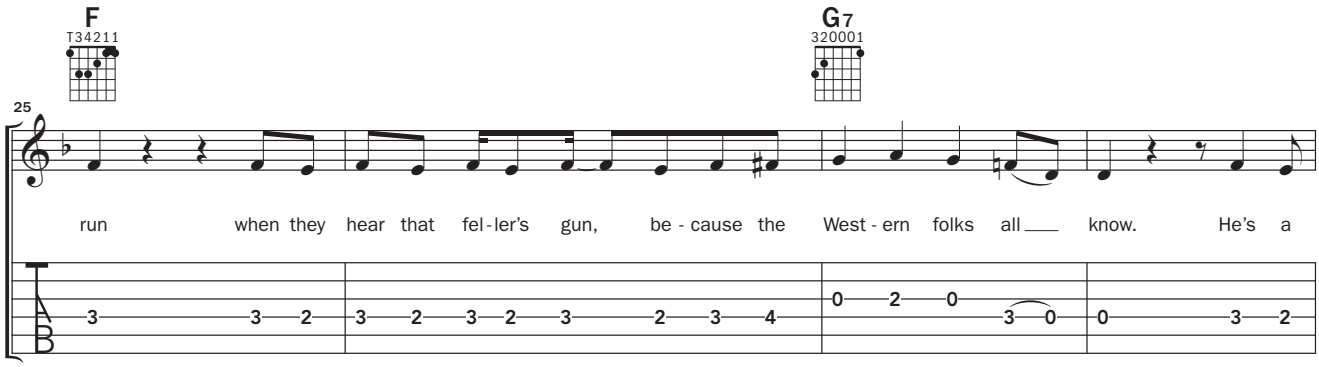


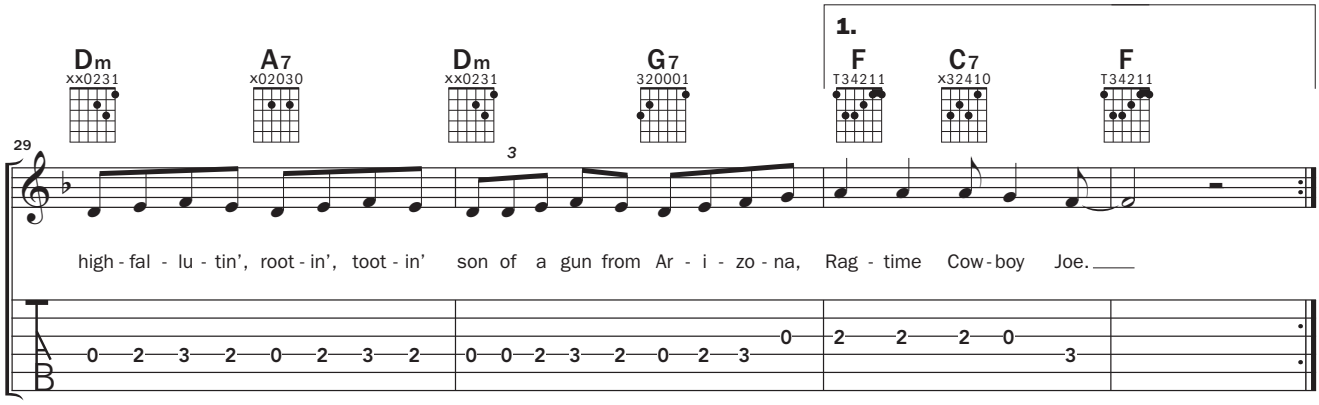


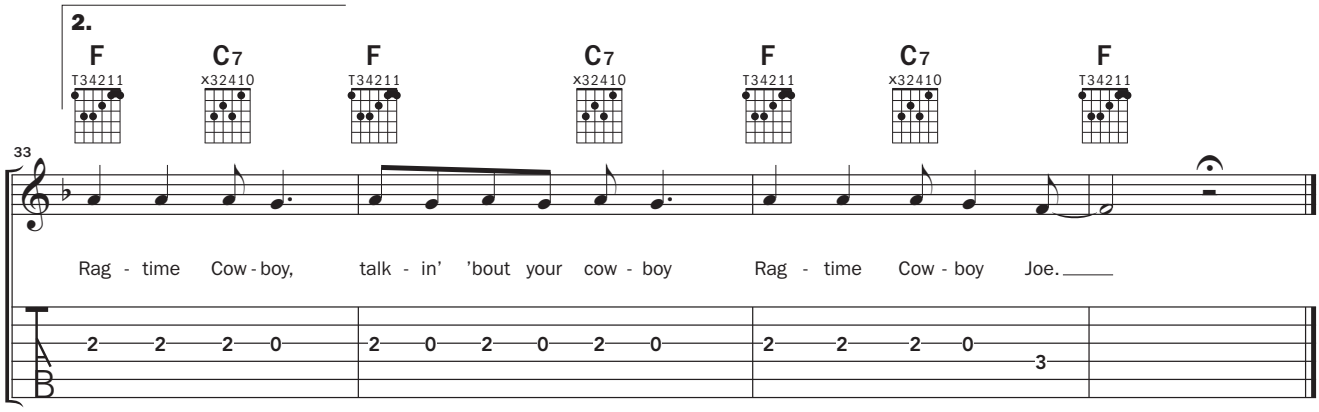
Chorus




C7 x32410
F T34211
Dm xx0231
G7 320001
C7 x32410
21
horse. That syn - co - pat - ed gai - ter, there's such a fun - ny me - ter to the roar of his re - peat - er. How they


F T34211
G7 320001
25
run when they hear that fel - ler's gun, be - cause the West - ern folks all know. He's a


Dm xx0231
A7 x02030
Dm xx0231
G7 320001
1.
F T34211
C7 x32410
F T34211
29
high - fal - lu - tin', root - in', toot - in' son of a gun from Ar - i - zo - na, Rag - time Cow - boy Joe.


2.
F T34211
C7 x32410
F T34211
C7 x32410
F T34211
C7 x32410
F T34211
33
Rag - time Cow - boy, talk - in' 'bout your cow - boy Rag - time Cow - boy Joe.

Mark Stutman

MAKERS & SHAKERS

CLAIRE BÉGIN

The Gibson Guy

How Mark Stutman became one of Canada's leading vintage dealers and repair techs

BY DAVID MCPHERSON

The sound of a customer fingerpicking a 1950 Gibson CF-100 in the front showroom of Folkway Music, in Waterloo, Ontario, an hour west of Toronto, drifts into owner Mark Stutman's office. On the floor lie guitar cases with instruments ready for repair. On one wall is a bookshelf with two decades' worth of *The Official Vintage Guitar Price Guide*. On another hangs a framed bill of sale from the store's most famous customer—more on that in a bit. Over a cup of coffee on an autumn afternoon, Stutman, also a passionate craftsman, shares his story. It's a tale of a left-handed kid filled with curiosity and an ear for uncommon sounds.

Stutman bought the current Folkways building in Waterloo six months after signing a five-year lease for another store in nearby Guelph. Between 2012 and 2016 he operated both locations. Finally, in 2016, when the Guelph lease expired, Stutman closed the shop there and moved Folkway Music permanently to the two-story historic home in Uptown Waterloo. Built in 1906, this address is where Charles Frederick Thiele, a legendary Canadian bandleader and composer, once lived. In that building, too, he founded Waterloo Music, one of Canada's first music stores, and went on to build the nation's largest music publishing house. Perhaps it's fate that a century later Thiele's family abode is now home to a world-renowned guitar shop.

AN AUDIOPHILE'S SONIC DISCOVERIES

"My father is an audiophile," says Stutman, 46. "He always had a fancy stereo system. Growing up, on weekends we used to go to high-fidelity shops, sit down, and put on a record like Dire Straits' *Brothers in Arms* on a set of $40,000 speakers. Then, we would just listen. For me, music wasn't ever about the lyrics or the song, it was about the sound."

Stutman combined his dad's affection for hi-fi sounds with an insatiable inquisitiveness about guitars. As a kid, he spent hours tinkering, trying to understand their inner workings. He was always fascinated by the sound of the guitar in all of its forms. "In Montreal, in the 1980s and '90s, I didn't have access to many left-handed guitars, so I would constantly search the classified ads," he recalls. "If I wanted a guitar, I would have to order it, sight unseen, and pay for it upfront. When the guitar arrived, if I didn't like it, I was out of luck."

This happened far too many times, so Stutman set his sights on a dream job as a guitar maker. With no formal training in lutherie, the teenaged Stutman kept tinkering and reading voraciously about guitars. At the University of

Waterloo, while his peers were busy studying, he sanded away at his Fender Stratocaster, refinishing it in the hallway outside his dorm room. After graduating with a B.A. in geography and unsure of what to do next, his parents gave him a nudge. As a graduation gift, they arranged for him to learn to build guitars from master craftsman Sergei de Jonge, who had apprenticed with Jean Larrivée in the 1960s and is part of the Toronto group of luthiers that includes Linda Manzer and Grit Laskin.

After completing de Jonge's course, Stutman, then 23, moved back to Waterloo. With no employment prospects, he crafted a resumé specific to guitar building and repair. He had recently joined the Association of Stringed Instrument Artisans and used its member list as a starting point. Stutman put a star next to everybody who was a guitar builder or repair person in Canada, or on the East Coast, West Coast, or Southwest of the U.S., all places he imagined living.

These were the nascent days of electronic communication, so into the mail went 400 stamped letters. Of those countless cold calls, 40 responded, and four were worth a follow-up. One was a guitar builder and store owner in Phoenix, Arizona. Stutman flew down and stayed with this luthier, whose name he cannot recall, for a couple of weeks. "I had no experience with guitar repair and I only knew how to build a guitar one way—left-handed," he recalls. "After a week, the owner offered to hire me at seven dollars an hour. He said, 'I will teach you one hour of guitar repair for every two hours of guitar building you do.' Basically, he wanted me to make guitars with his name on them."

No surprise, Stutman refused. He returned home to Canada with no employment prospects in his preferred profession. A friend from university tipped him off to a gig with a boatbuilder in nearby Guelph. With no other options, Stutman agreed. He moved there and for the next year was the low man on the totem pole, spending 12 hours a day sanding 1930s replicas of 35-foot mahogany Muskoka boats worth a quarter of a million dollars each. Meanwhile, he put a repair bench in his small apartment and did some work on the side for local musicians and a few music stores in town.

'From that moment on I learned everything I could about vintage guitars and went down this crazy rabbit hole.'

CLAIRE BÉGIN

AN AUSPICIOUS URL

In 1997, Stutman was biking into downtown Guelph from his apartment in the suburbs when he noticed a cool spot for rent for $600 a month in a commercial building. Armed with some savings and a loan from his parents, Stutman—despite having no business plan—co-signed the lease with his father. The original store was small, mainly just a place for the budding guitar maker to build and repair instruments. "I would find a guitar that was broken, or someone would bring in a guitar to fix and it was too much money, so I would buy it and repair and resell it," Stutman explains. "This was before the internet really exploded. I did anything to make money, including giving guitar lessons."

Suddenly, more and more guitars arrived at the store. Then, in 1999, for his 25th birthday, Stutman's sister bought him the URL folkwaymusic.com. At the time he knew nothing about vintage instruments. "I bought all the tools, put up a sign, and waited; I was fixing what I could. I also designed the space to have a real hip vibe, with a coffee machine and a live music component every week—over the years we've hosted shows by musicians like Doug Paisley, Joan Shelley, and the Milk Carton Kids."

CRAZY RABBIT HOLE

One day a customer brought Stutman a refinished Gibson. "I had no clue what this guitar was," he remembers. "The guy told me it was a Southern Jumbo [SJ-200], known by vintage guitar collectors and aficionados as 'the king of the flattops.' I felt like a total idiot! I'm supposed to be the expert. From that moment on I learned everything I could about vintage guitars and went down this crazy rabbit hole."

Stutman hired another craftsman who knew a lot more about vintage guitars, and the pair spent endless hours scouring eBay for vintage instruments, at a time when certain models could be had on the cheap. "In 2001, you couldn't make any money on vintage Martins, since they were already selling for big dollars," Stutman says. "But you still could on Gibsons. I would stay up until 2:00 AM to find and bid on L-OOs, J-45s, and J-35s.

"Every penny I had went to buying guitars on eBay," Stutman continues. "I was in debt like crazy, spending way more money than I had,

and I still had no business acumen. I was always at the bottom of my line of credit, but I had these guitars, and this slick website, and figured eventually people would find me."

THE GIBSON GUY

In 2000, Stutman was contacted by one of his parents' neighbors about selling a portion of his collection—$90,000 worth of vintage high-end Gibsons. "This was the real deal!" Stutman says. "Maybe it was a terrible idea, maybe it was a great idea, time would tell. I borrowed money from my parents and bought them all."

Having those Golden Era Gibsons, among them a 1934 Jumbo, a J-35, and a L-OO, put Folkway Music on the map. But the investment took a toll. "It took me nearly eight years to sell all those guitars because I overpaid for them due to my naiveté and had to wait for the market to catch up," Stutman recalls. "I relied on the seller's knowledge. He was very persuasive as to their worth and I was still young and new to the game."

These lessons learned drove Stutman to increase his Gibson knowledge. He devoured *Gruhn's Guide to Vintage Guitars* and other sources. Mainly, he learned by doing, just like when he was a teenager in his bedroom tinkering with his first acoustic guitars. As he began to do more and more repair work on vintage Gibsons, Stutman used mirrors and flashlights to see how they were built. "My knowledge is an aggregate of every guitar that has ever crossed my bench," he says.

Those guitars begat similar guitars and were especially valuable as marketing tools to build the Folkway Music brand online. Slowly, Stutman became known as the Gibson guy. Social media marketing has continued to build this reputation, as the store posts daily to Instagram, showcasing the latest guitars for sale, along with tips and tricks on guitar repair.

A BESPOKE EXPERIENCE

Though Folkway's core business is vintage, it boasts a curated selection of high-end new acoustics from brands such as Martin, Gibson, Taylor, National, and Collings. Also for sale are vintage electrics by Fender, Gibson, Gretsch, and other makers; Deering Goodtime banjos; Eastman mandolins; and Kiwaya ukuleles.

Whether Folkway Music sells a $60,000 instrument or an entry-level model, the customer service approach is the same. "Even if we are selling a $500 guitar, we are doing it in a different way," Stutman explains. "It gets set up before it gets to the floor, we are teaching people about humidity, about tone, and how you hold your pick . . . it's very personal. It has a bespoke vibe without the pretentious overtones and financial repercussions."

CLAIRE BÉGIN

'My knowledge is an aggregate of every guitar that has ever crossed my bench.'

Beyond selling guitars, repair and restoration of vintage acoustics remains where Stutman's passion truly lies. It is the foundation of the business, going back to the store's roots in 1999. "That is my gig," he says. "I do historically accurate restoration work. Anything I do to a guitar results in it looking totally original."

Stutman employs two full-time repair technicians and one part-time junior technician, who does most of the setup work and builds guitars in his spare time. Listen closely and you can hear these repairman at work upstairs sanding and winding strings. "Some might think our repairs are expensive, but we do more and have the same hourly rates as other shops," Stutman says.

Today, customers from around the world ship guitars to Folkway Music for repairs. They trust Stutman and his staff to handle each vintage instrument with care. Due to the pandemic, the store does not get many touring musicians stopping in these days, but a who's who of guitar players are loyal Folkway Music customers. As Stutman says, "You may not have heard of them, but you've *heard* them," like all of Norah Jones' band from the singer-songwriter's *Come Away with Me* era [Kevin Breit, Bill Frisell, Adam Levy, Adam Rogers, and Tony Scherr]. Grammy-winning musician John Leventhal is a regular customer, and singer-songwriter Joe Henry is not only a longtime client but a friend.

Oh, and there's also a famous customer whose framed bill of sale hangs on Stutman's office wall: Mr. Slowhand himself—Eric Clapton—who bought a mint-condition 1929 Gibson L-1 like the one seen in the most famous photograph of blues legend Robert Johnson. Selling guitars to the stars is cool, but for Stutman, it's the regular collectors who are as passionate about their instruments as he is that he most loves dealing with. "It's not about the celebrities," he says. "Sure, it's fun, but it's the everyday people who want a nice guitar. That is what it's really about." AG

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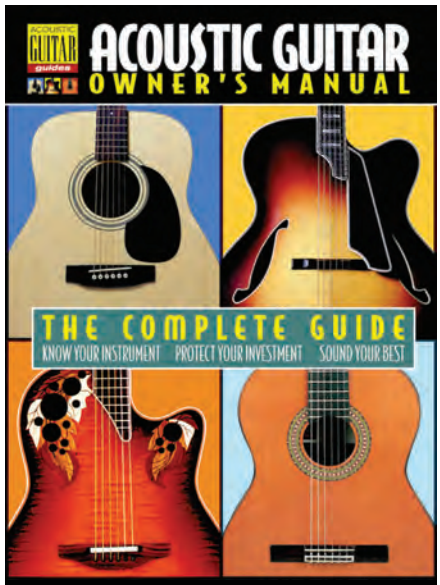

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Getting Even

Troubleshooting imbalance between strings on common pickup systems

BY MARTIN KEITH

Q: *"I recently had the action adjusted on my acoustic-electric guitar. The plugged-in sound is now very uneven—the high and low E strings are hollow-sounding and quieter than the rest. What happened, and what should I do to fix it?*

—Roberta H., via email

A: Ah, piezo pickups. They have vastly simplified the task of live performing with acoustic guitars, and over the years they have improved dramatically. Originally notorious for their thin, scratchy quack, piezo systems have evolved into a broad family of acoustic sensors that can be quite musical and robust-sounding, if they are properly installed. However, that last part is the proverbial Big If—and many (many, many!) piezo systems suffer from installation problems that result in less-than-ideal sound.

Most common piezo sensors fall into two categories: undersaddle or top-/body-mounted. Both have their strengths and weaknesses, and some more advanced systems even combine the two in an attempt to get the best of both. The majority of factory guitars have undersaddle systems, largely because they are easy to install and offer solid output and less feedback than body sensors. The downside of undersaddle pickups is that they tend to have a very strong, spiky transient attack, which can make the guitar sound harsh or unappealing, especially when played with a heavy right hand. Body sensors tend to have a more airy and natural response, with more of the instrument's character in the tone—but they can suffer from lower output, uneven balance, and problematic feedback. For these reasons, top sensors tend to work better for fingerstylists and performers who play at lower volumes in smaller settings.

You can check the flatness of your saddle by removing it and placing the bottom edge against a ruler.

BILL EVANS

Without having your guitar on my workbench, I'd be willing to bet that the culprit is the underside of the saddle (the white strip of bone or composite that the strings contact at the bridge). The word piezo comes from the Greek word for pressure, and piezo systems rely on compression from the strings in order to couple with the guitar's vibration and create a signal. When the pickup is sandwiched between the saddle and the bridge, it needs to be fully and evenly in contact along its entire length. If it isn't, the result will be what you describe—hollow-sounding strings and uneven volume.

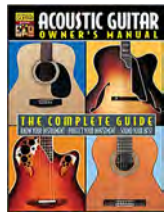
If your tech adjusted your action by sanding the bottom of the saddle (a common approach), then it's likely that they didn't sand it perfectly flat and square. Check it by removing the saddle from your guitar (you'll have to take off the strings, of course!) and placing the bottom edge against a ruler or straight surface. If you can see light or gaps at the outside ends, then the saddle needs to be flattened.

While removing the saddle, take note of how tightly it fits in the slot. My rule of thumb for saddle fit literally involves my thumb, along with my index finger: I'd like to be able to remove the saddle using just those two digits, but it should be just snug enough to stay in place when the guitar is turned over. If the saddle is

Martin Keith

GOT A QUESTION?

Uncertain about guitar care and maintenance? The ins-and-outs of guitar building? Or another topic related to your gear? Ask *Acoustic Guitar*'s repair expert Martin Keith by sending an email titled "Repair Expert" to Editors.AG@stringletter.com and we'll forward it to Keith.



If *AG* selects your question for publication, you'll receive a complimentary copy of *AG*'s *Acoustic Guitar Owner's Manual.*

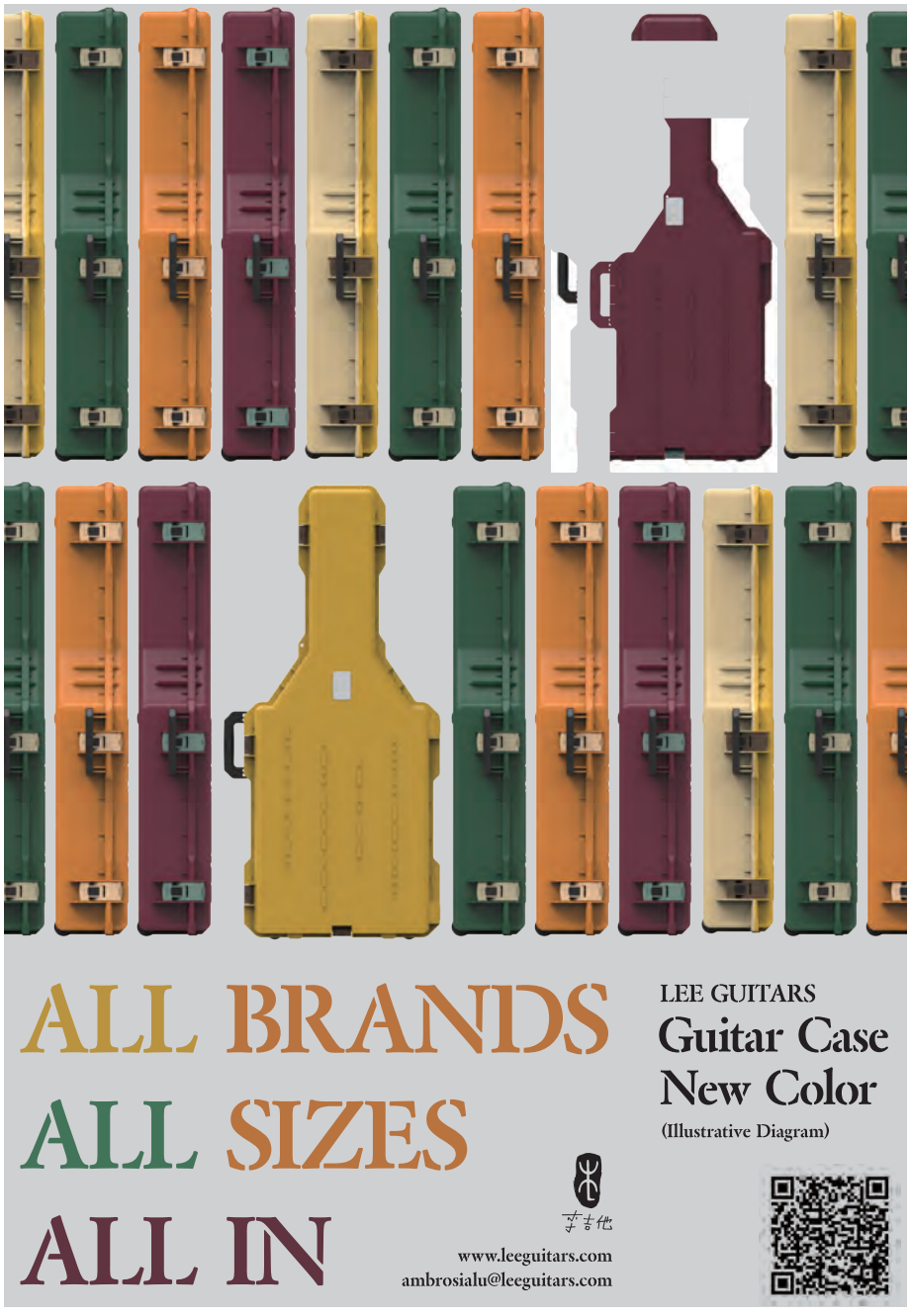
too tight, it can bind or seize in the slot, preventing the even pressure that the pickup needs. However, if it's too loose, the saddle can tilt over in its slot, which will also compromise pickup performance (and may lead to a cracked bridge!). If the saddle is too tight, sand the faces lightly with 220 or higher grit paper until it fits as described above.

If you are still experiencing balance issues but the saddle is perfectly straight and flat, then the next possible culprit is the saddle slot itself. Most flat-top guitars are not really flat—some have gently domed tops engineered in during construction, while others were built flat but have bulged forward from string pressure. Some amount of this is normal and is generally considered the sign of a responsively built instrument. However, this top distortion can sometimes result in a flexed bridge, which could mean that the bottom of the slot has taken on a convex shape. If you have a competent luthier nearby, they can often reroute the saddle slot to create a flat surface if the top has flexed too far. It may be necessary to use jacks or other braces inside the guitar to simulate the string pressure on the top, so the slot can be flattened accurately.

A slightly less invasive approach to dealing with curved saddle slots is to build some flex into the saddle itself. In cases where flattening was impractical or impossible, I've resolved string balance issues by drilling five small (1/16-inch) holes through the saddle, between each pair of strings. These holes travel through the saddle in the same direction as the string paths, and I drill them just below where the saddle is visible at the bridge, so they don't show on the assembled instrument. Then, I saw a small slot from the bottom of the saddle up to each hole, creating a keyhole shape. This idea follows the same principle as the kerfed lining inside your guitar—the slots allow the saddle to flex evenly, and help it conform to the curve at the bottom of your saddle slot. This quick approach has solved many a string balance issue for me, in less time than it takes to jig up a Dremel tool and recut a slot.

It can be tempting to try to put a little shim under the weak string, to try and regain a bit of extra pressure and even out the balance. I've come across plenty of these when digging into bridge setups to resolve these pickup problems. My experience has been that this approach usually *almost* works, but never quite resolves things completely. Adding a shim to the weak string will focus more pressure on that spot, but it will create a step in the surface that robs the adjacent string(s) of good contact. If the strings are not responding evenly, the problem is that the surfaces are not flat and even, so making them even less so is not likely to be fruitful. This is a case where one should treat the cause, not just the symptom.

One last point worth mentioning: piezo systems are also very sensitive to the signal chain. I've had several clients bring me instruments to solve an apparent pickup issue, only to discover than the guitar sounded great when plugged into a proper input. Any passive piezo pickup will need a high-impedance input (such as an acoustic preamp) to sound good, and even many onboard active systems suffer from poor matches between pickup and preamp. If the tone is thin, scratchy, overly compressed, or lacking in bass warmth, it could easily be the result of a bad combination of guitar and amp. Unfortunately, these same problems can also arise from issues with fit and installation, so it can sometimes take an experienced tech to tell the difference. I've spent what feels like years of my life trying to debug uneven piezo systems, and I know how frustrating it can be. If you're lucky, a bit of quick sanding or filing on the bottom of your bridge saddle should have your guitar sounding good. AG



Yamaha FGX3

1960s classics provide the inspiration for a player-friendly new guitar

BY NICK MILLEVOI

In 1966, Yamaha introduced its first folk guitar, the FG-180. This Japanese-made dreadnought offered an affordable alternative to the popular steel-strings making the rounds of the folk circuit and, sure enough, one ended up onstage at Woodstock in the hands of Country Joe McDonald. The Red Label series of Yamaha guitars from this period built a reputation as hidden gems amongst a sea of American-made acoustics, and over the years, singer-songwriters such as Big Star's Chris Bell, Jeff Buckley, and Elliott Smith crafted some of their best work on the FG-180.

Yamaha has been paying tribute to the first-generation Red Label guitars with its FG/FS Red Label acoustics. While not copies of the originals, they're modernized instruments that are inspired by the series. The line offers two body styles: the smaller concert and the Traditional Western, which is a big-bodied instrument offered in several models—the FG3, FG5, FGX3, and FGX5. I took the FGX3 for a spin to see what these modern Red Labels are all about.

SPECS

BODY Traditional Western size; solid Sitka spruce top with mahogany back and sides; ebony bridge with urea saddle; semigloss finish

NECK 14-fret African mahogany neck; 25" scale; 15 3/4" radius ebony fingerboard; 1 3/4" urea nut; open-gear chrome tuners

OTHER Yamaha Atmosfeel electronics; Elixir Nanoweb 80/20 Bronze Light strings (.012–.053); hard bag

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SOLID BUILD AND SIMPLE LOOKS

On appearance alone, it's clear that the FGX3 is meant to be a no-nonsense workhorse, much like its predecessors. No time was wasted worrying about decorative details when Yamaha created the FGX3—the guitar sports a simple black-and-white rosette and binding, a single-ply black pickguard, and chrome open-gear tuners—but it possesses an understated elegance.

The solid Sitka spruce top features scalloped braces, and the solid mahogany back and sides include additional side bracing, giving the guitar a strong and extra-durable feel. All of the wood on the FGX3 has been through Yamaha's Acoustic Resonance Enhancement (A.R.E.)—basically, a torrefaction process that uses heat, moisture, and pressure to mimic wood's aging process, enhancing sustain and volume. While there's certainly no mistaking the FGX3 for a vintage instrument, it does have a loose, played-in feel right out of the case and is responsive throughout the frequency spectrum.

I found the FGX3 to be much more than the folk guitar that the series claims it to be.

BREEZY STRUMMING AND SLINKY FEEL

Maybe it's because of the big body size—19-7/8 inches long, 16-1/4 inches wide, and 4-5/8 inches deep—but sitting with the FGX3, I couldn't help but notice how sharp the body's edges felt. It was a little uncomfortable at first, but I did settle in after playing the instrument for a spell.

Dimesions aside, the guitar has a soft, warm tone that works great for fingerpicked chord patterns and breezy strumming. When strumming chords with a pick, I found it definitely sounds best to approach the FGX3 with a more delicate touch—a thinner pick and a soft strum can go a long way—while heavy-handed strumming and picking tend to get harsh. Approached with a light to medium touch, chords sound rich while maintaining a clarity that allows individual notes to shine.

The 25-inch-scale matte-finished African mahogany neck is a breeze to play, with an agreeably low action in all positions of the neck. I quickly noticed how slinky this guitar feels—it's particularly easy to bend strings across the ebony fretboard, which is a fun treat that had me playing lead lines up and down the neck. In this way, I found the FGX3 to be much more than the folk guitar that the series claims it to be. In fact, it's a versatile modern instrument that is well-suited for a variety of playing styles and uses.

Singer-songwriters would certainly feel comfortable heading out to open mics or hitting the road with the FGX3. With such easy playability and durable construction, it's a reliable instrument to travel around with. I wouldn't worry about throwing it into an overpacked van for full-band gigs. The FGX3 comes equipped with Yamaha's Atmosfeel pickup system, which includes an undersaddle pickup, contact sensor, mic, and three low-profile controls—master volume, mic blend, and bass EQ—on the guitar's top side. I had higher hopes for the versatility and amplified sound after reading about the pickup system, and was a little let down when I plugged it in. But it is certainly a more dimensional system than your standard piezo pickup, and it offers a good amount of tonal control.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The FGX3 is a solid, gig-ready instrument. Much like the well-loved Red Label Yamahas of the 1960s and '70s, this guitar almost calls out to be played, and features a sound and playability that makes it a worthy candidate not only for folk but for a variety of musical situations. At $1,000 street, it's a nice mid-price guitar that could be a big step up from an entry level instrument or a great alternative for a gigging musician who needs a guitar that's sturdy enough to withstand the rigors of the road. AG

Fishman PowerTap Rare Earth and Infinity

The addition of body sensors takes classic pickups to a new level

BY EMILE MENASCHÉ

Electric guitar pickups have it easy. They're celebrated for their tone-coloring effects, and their quality is subjective. Acoustic pickups, on the other hand, have the thankless job of being neutral and measuring up to an all but impossible standard—replicating the unplugged sound of the guitar itself. This problem is enough to make even the toughest electrical engineers cry into their pocket protectors.

Enter Fishman's new PowerTap series, which mates either a soundhole or undersaddle pickup to its new TAP (which stands for Touch, Ambience, and Percussion) body sensors. The sensors are designed to capture percussive elements, body resonances, and performance dynamics that pickups alone tend to miss.

I checked out both versions of the system: The soundhole PowerTap Earth (installed on a PRS SE A40E) and the undersaddle PowerTap Infinity (retrofitted to a Guild F-150CE), each with a street price of $299.95 (guitar, of course, not included). Both versions come with battery-powered active onboard electronics and offer either mono or stereo output, for all kinds of sonic flexibility.

POWERTAP EARTH

The soundhole member of the PowerTap family features Fishman's Rare Earth humbucker, designed to fit soundholes as small as 3-5/8 inches in diameter. I was impressed with just how small its footprint is—it's way less obtrusive than a typical magnetic pickup. And visually, it blends nicely with the pretty PRS.

The compactness is all the more impressive because the pickup's housing also includes an onboard preamp, powered by a pair of LR44 1.5V batteries or a single CR11108. (Unfortunately, you need to remove the pickup to replace the batteries, which could be a problem at a gig.)

Fishman says the active electronics can drive an instrument cable up to 80 feet long. And while I didn't put it through that kind of heavy lifting, it was impressively quiet and sonically detailed running in mono mode through a 25-foot cable directly into my Universal Audio Apollo interface. It also provided plenty of signal level without needing an external preamp for boost.

Controls are minimal. There's just a blend dial on the pickup's housing to mix the magnetic and sensor signals. Although I didn't really miss having a tone control, a volume dial might have come in handy. On the rest of the guitar, the output level changed depending on how much body sensor I had in the mix.

Fishman equips the Rare Earth with neodymium magnets because they are thought to sound warmer and more accurate than other pickup magnets. And with the blend control biased towards the pickup alone, the tone has plenty of sparkle, with a tight, punchy bass and a nice dip in the midrange. As with any

magnetic pickup, the sound emphasizes attack and string presence. But it never gets strident or too electric.

Blending in the body sensors' signal added depth and body—but it also increased the overall output enough that I had to adjust my interface to avoid distorting the input. (That's when I missed that volume control.)

While a body sensor is going to sound different in different guitars, the TAP—mounted on the top under the bridge—complements the magnetic pickup very well on the PRS. For my playing style on this guitar, a little TAP went a long way—I was actually surprised to find that my sweet-spot blend leaned toward the magnetic pickup (between 60 and 70 percent, depending on what I was playing). With the magnetic pickup taking the lead, the sensors added a 3D quality. On this particular rig, the tone lost its focus when the TAP was too prominent in the mix.

However, the ideal blend is likely to vary on different instruments. The PRS is a bright, lively-sounding guitar that benefited from the magnetic pickup's ability to capture string detail.

Did the system sound unplugged? Not entirely. But it does sound very acoustic—even when I listen through headphones. Once I dialed back the interface's input, I was really able to lay into the strings and the Fishman electronics had all the headroom I needed.

The RareEarth pickup has a very fast response, so it was a good match for fast flat-picking and aggressive fingerstyle snaps and pops. But its warmth also works nicely for mellower fingerpicking and quiet strumming.

POWERTAP INFINITY

The undersaddle member of the PowerTap family is a bit more elaborate than its magnetic sibling, at least in terms of its available controls. Hidden under the top and mounted on either side of the soundhole, the preamp is split into two physical units—one offering a blend control between the undersaddle and body sensor pickups, the other housing volume and tone dials. The Infinity package is available in three sizes to accommodate various guitar dimensions.

As with the PowerTap Earth, the blend is key to producing the most natural sound for a given playing style. However, this time I leaned more to a 50–50 mix between the undersaddle and the sensor. Fishman's undersaddle pickups are OEM on so many guitars for a reason—they work. But on its own, even the best undersaddle pickup tends to sound hyper-focused and nasal.

Which is why I found the body sensor to be even more of an asset with the Infinity than I did with the Earth. Here too, the sensors added depth to create a more 3D sound. But this time, they seemed to enhance the tone on the top and on the bottom of the frequency spectrum, adding both air and body to balance against that undersaddle midrange. The TAP brought more overtones into focus while adding a woody character to the tone that undersaddle pickups never quite capture.

I did have to mess with the controls to get the perfect mix between the pickups—but that also showed the system's versatility. As mentioned above, there's a blend control (with a center detent at the 50–50 mix point), a volume dial, and an interesting tone control: It works only on the undersaddle pickup, leaving the sensor unaffected. So in a way, the Tone dial functions as part of the blend equation. It ranges from flat to a deep midrange scoop that does a good job of taming the pickup's inherent mid emphasis.

The TAP brought more overtones into focus while adding a woody character to the tone that undersaddle pickups never quite capture.

Once I had a good mix with the blend control, I was able to use the tone control to fine-tune the sound to the style and intensity of the music—without having to change the balance between the pickups. Personally, I like a deeper scoop for strummed parts and less mid cut for fingerstyle work, and the Fishman accommodated me.

As with the PowerTap Earth, the preamp was clean and had plenty of headroom. In my tests, the PowerTap Infinity was noticeably hotter than its sibling. And the volume control was an asset.

SPLITTING THE PICKUPS

I did the bulk of my tests using a mono instrument cable with both pickups feeding the same interface channel under the assumption that it's the easiest—and therefore likeliest—option for most players. But since each test guitar came with a splitter cable, I figured I'd give that a go as well.

It makes a huge difference. Running both direct to the Apollo with no other processing between the guitar and preamp, the tone itself wasn't very different between mono and stereo—a testament to the good balance you can dial up in mono mode.

But the ability to process the sensors separately opened up the sound—and with that, all kinds of creative possibilities. For example, you can add a tiny bit more reverb to the sensor to increase the sense of dimension, or separately fine-tune the EQ to match each pickup to your instrument's inherent quirks. Even panning the two pickups hard-left and -right offered some interesting sounds. If you have access to a small mixer or multichannel amplifier, I suggest feeding the pickups to separate channels and experimenting—even if the signal you sent the audience gets summed back to mono.

While the split mode sounded great with both PowerTap versions, it worked especially well with the PowerTap Earth. The PRS sounded *almost* miked up on a test recording I made with each pickup on its own channel. The Infinity sounded big in a different way. Again, the two guitars also played a role in the sound the pickups delivered—and that's as it should be.

TAP OUT

Fishman's PowerTap series impressed me, in large part because both the PowerTap Earth and PowerTap Infinity are bringing a new dimension—body sensors—to tried-and-true performers. Whether you like the focus of the magnetic Earth or the presence of the undersaddle Infinity, both units are an affordable upgrade to one-element pickups. Each model managed to capture the character of its respective guitar.

Lack of a volume control aside, I found the Earth very easy to live with. Good in mono, it really came to life in split stereo mode. The Infinity took more tweaking to dial in but has a broader range of available tones. Because it has both volume and tone controls, it might be more appealing if you're using a one-channel amp or feeding a single DI box onstage.

Another plus: Both are relatively affordable and can be retrofitted to an existing guitar. Fishman recommends getting professional installation but does offer detailed instructions for courageous lay people; the Earth looks like a better bet for DIY. **fishman.com** AG

Boss Acoustic Singer Live LT

More than just a compact stage amp, a tool for creative expression

BY JAMES ROTONDI

Before I talk about the sound quality of the Boss Acoustic Singer Live LT—which is, with only a caveat or two, pretty darn good—it's important to note that the ASL LT is *light*. Look, even fairly compact acoustic amps can still be heavy enough to rupture a disk, especially on those solo gig nights where you're carrying your entire rig—guitar, effects, preamp, amp, merchandise, mics, mic stand, etc.—entirely on your own aging spinal column. Sound is important, sure, and so is volume. But lightness is a virtue, and at only 22.5 pounds, the LT may not be quite an angel, but it's earning plenty of good karma in chiropractic heaven.

VIRTUE SIGNALING

It's a virtue that the Boss Acoustic Singer Live XT balances with other virtues, like simplicity, minimalism, good aesthetics, audio flexibility (USB recording and a Mix/DI output), dual mic/guitar channels, a reasonable power rating—bi-amped at 60 watts—and ease of use. The back-tilted front control panel is refreshingly spare, tucking both the XLR-input-equipped mic channel and the 1/4-inch input guitar channels horizontally across the panel's face, with controls for volume, bass, middle and treble, along with a smart control for each of its independent effects sections, plus a dedicated reverb control for each channel. The guitar channel sports Phase and Acoustic Resonance LED buttons; the mic channel, an Enhance LED button. For the combined output, the amp offers an anti-feedback notch control knob and a master volume.

All of this makes great sense for the self-contained solo acoustic artist playing a small room. (A *quite* small room, I'd argue, but more on that in a minute.) Why? Because if you sing, you need more than just a fine acoustic amp for your guitar, and to avoid schlepping effects boxes, you may well want just the essential effects on tap, with minimum fuss, on the amp itself. Because mics can sound a bit flat at low volumes without a preamp, the Enhance button adds what sounds like compression and presence; because warmth can be an issue without a guitar preamp, Acoustic Resonance fires up the sound with more woody low-to-high mids. And because on a typical intimate house-concert gig you don't need to flatten the back row, and chatter should be minimal, 60 watts is often sufficient. Plenty of amps offer comparable features, but there's an elegance and a Zen focus to this amp that is laudable.

A SONIC YOUTH

Now, the ASL LT sounds terrific, particularly at its middle volume range. It's a sophisticated and punchy sound that emanates from the bi-amped 6.5-inch woofer and 1-inch high-frequency tweeter, and there's plenty of sparkling detail and whoomph for such a small speaker. I ran my Larrivee OM-05, a Martin SC-13E, and a Taylor 114ce into the guitar channel, and a Shure SM57 through the mic channel, and immediately felt gratified by the presence and width of the vocal sound—that Enhance button really fills in the voice's EQ—and was maybe even a little stunned by how big and punchy my guitars sounded. Imagine feeling like you have to turn the bass knob *down* on an amp this size when it's only at noon!

The preprogrammed effects are smartly dialed. The left half of the guitar effects knob's throw is delay—from a moderate slapback gradually to a wetter slapback; then from a single-repeat quick quarter-note delay to ever-longer and more feedbacking quarter-note delays. Pleasing and with good width. Chorus occupies the right side of the throw and proved especially useful at the lower and higher ends of the spectrum, from a nice subtle detuning effect to a more drenched modulation, though one wishes the top range had ratcheted up the depth, intensity, and especially speed more than it does. Meanwhile, the mic effects knob also boasts delay, which follows the same sonic range as the guitar's delay and echo, again with slapback to increasing time/regen quarter-note delays, but with a darker, more tape-inspired tone. Reverbs are smooth and fairly transparent, generally, with a savvy amount of pre-delay, though they get a bit steely at the higher end of the throw. The back panel features independent foot controller outputs for each effects section, so you can tailor your time-base hands-free on the gig.

That back panel may be just as key to this potent little amp as the front. That's because at

higher volume levels—and by this I mean anything past 2 o'clock on the master—the mic channel especially can begin to get crunchy, and the separation between mic and guitar loses its fidelity. I found a few ways to ameliorate that. Let the channel volume do more of the work (think 1–2 o'clock or more) and adjust the master accordingly. Turn off the Enhance LED button when pushing more volume with the amp, as it'll get distorted much quicker, and you honestly don't need it at higher volumes—the power section will do all the enhancing you need. (Enhance is ideal for lower volume settings where vocals can very often sound a bit flat.) And of course, when you're belting, it's always a good idea to back off the mic anyway.

FLEX-ABLE

One last point about this little powerhouse (no, not the affordable price point, but that doesn't suck, either): it's versatile and adaptable to different musical settings. Yes, you can use the back-panel XLR/DI output and the 1/4-inch recording/phones output to send signal to a house PA, while retaining the ASL LT's great tone shaping, effects, and preamp qualities. Yes, that also means the ASL LT is a terrific, portable monitor for all your gigs, even bigger ones. And yes, you can use the USB output to record your performances direct to a computer or smart device, again, retaining control over EQ, effects, and overall sonics the way you dictate. (Do get the optional foot controller so you're really *producing* as you play.)

THE TAKEAWAY

There's one last aspect of the Acoustic Singer that is really worth mentioning. It's a practice amp that doubles as a song machine. It's so light and so small that you'll keep it in your hotel room, bedroom, or studio, and you'll have a gig-quality PA at any time and any place. Look, guitarists typically write acoustic-based songs or craft guitar instrumentals sitting on the side of the couch or studio chair and strumming and singing into the free air. Nothing wrong with that.

But the Boss Acoustic Singer Live LT lets you tap into a certain live electricity at apartment volumes, in kitchen-sized spaces, and at motel room locales. That's creative gold right there. It's true that the amp won't supply the audience for you, but on second thought, the version of you that passes through its circuit board may well help you find one. AG

SPECS

AMP Two channels, 60W bi-amped; XLR (mic), 1/4" (instrument), and 1/8" TRS (stereo aux) inputs; XLR DI out; 1/8" headphone/rec out; USB B port

SPEAKERS 6.5" woofer; 1" dome tweeter

DIMENSIONS 11.81" x 14.37" x 10.68"; 22.5 lbs

OTHER 3-band EQ; reverb, delay/chorus (guitar); delay/echo (mic); anti-feedback notch control; optional footswitch

MADE IN Malaysia

PRICE $399.99 street

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Pierre Bensusan
Azwan
(MVDAudio)

Delicate, Unspeakable Beauty

Steel-string virtuoso reimagines his guitar as an orchestra

BY KENNY BERKOWITZ

Forty years ago, back in the days when people dubbed their favorite music onto cassettes, my buddy Chris came to work with Pierre Bensusan's debut, *Près de Paris*. I thought it was astonishingly beautiful, and even though a lot has happened since—Chris has become a musicology professor, and Bensusan has become widely known as one of the greatest guitarists in the world—my feelings about *Près de Paris*' perfection haven't changed.

Over the course of ten studio albums, Bensusan has moved away from the simplicity of fiddle tunes, and starting with his 1982 release *Solilai*, he's been focusing entirely on his own compositions, gaining complexity and sophistication as his sense of improvisation moves closer to jazz. Now, with *Azwan*, whose title comes from watching a flock of birds flying together "as one," he's continuing to draw his influences together measure by measure, envisioning his guitar as an orchestra that can deliver melody, bass, chords, and counterpoint at the same time.

From one bar to the next, there's always a lot happening, and within a short piece like "Return to Ireland," you can trace threads back to Spanish classical guitar, flamenco, Claude Debussy, Erik Satie, John Renbourn, and harpist Turlough O'Carolan. Melodic ideas float freely across time and space, and in the song's brief span, Bensusan quietly plucks the upper strings, rumbles his fingers across the lower strings, plays simultaneous ascending and descending lines, picks single strings and ringing three-note clusters, traces a gentle, stately melody up and down the neck, and closes the piece on a chord that seems to hang in mid-air, somehow making it all sound perfectly effortless.

Bensusan's touch keeps growing increasingly subtle, and it's steadily matched by the responsiveness of his 1978 Lowden, producing a variety of tones and textures along the spectrum.

The piece "Dia Libre" begins with a light, ringing melancholy, then reaches deeper each time he returns to the main theme, adding unlikely harmonies, stuttering notes, and tempo shifts to push the sound toward Gypsy jazz, with Bensusan scat-singing around a violin countermelody by Christophe Cravero as the song builds complexity and intensity.

Compositionally, that's worlds away from the bossa nova "Without You," which begins as an homage to Kenny Rankin, or the percussive slapping of "Wee Dander," or the sweet, singsong melodies of "Corps Vaudou," or the richly emotional lyricism of the title track. Dedicated to Bensusan's wife, "Azwan" inhabits a patient stillness at the center of the album, a hopefulness, a dream of peace—even as the tune shifts direction, veering one way, then the next, and ending in a flurry of harmonics that hover like a question mark. It's the heart of an album where each track feels strikingly different, with each telling its own story and each reaching for a different kind of delicate, unspeakable beauty. AG

Molly Tuttle

. . . but I'd rather be with you

(Compass Records)

Taking chances outside her comfort zone

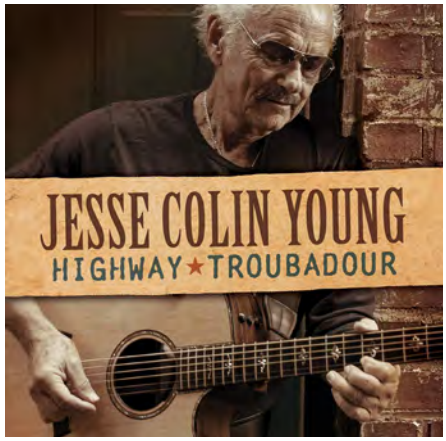
The title of Molly Tuttle's latest release, *. . . but I'd rather be with you* (from the Grateful Dead's "Standing on the Moon"), may indicate how she'd like to make records—sharing spontaneity and intimacy with live musicians. Instead, a socially distanced Tuttle recorded her guitar and vocals for this covers collection herself before sending the tracks to producer Tony Berg, who meted out parts to session players. Happily, the warmth of Tuttle's performances belies her second solo album's remote assembly.

Here, Tuttle downplays the barnstorming bluegrass dexterity that made her reputation, focusing rather on other songwriters' tunes—some of which lie well outside her comfort zone. If you ever wondered what psychedelic chamber-country sounds like, listen to her take on the Rolling Stones' "She's a Rainbow." Mostly Tuttle sticks to the original's baroque pop arrangement, until a cascading sweep-picking run entwines Appalachian barn-burning guitar with '60s pop-rock. Cat Stevens' "How Can I Tell You" also benefits from Tuttle's country-pop fusion approach. Her vocals convey Stevens' melancholy romance, before her ringing cross-picking urges the tune to a full-throttled gallop.

Tuttle takes even bigger chances. On The National's majestic "Fake Empire," she enthusiastically embraces tricky polyrhythms, and on Rancid's "Olympia, WA," she harnesses the original's overdriven punk rock roar and transforms it into a swinging roots rocker with a quicksilver instrumental run.

This and a sprightly canter through the Yeah Yeah Yeah's "Zero" prove that Tuttle can still excel on the songs furthest outside her wheelhouse.

—Pat Moran



Jesse Colin Young

Highway Troubadour

(BMG)

Familiar songs in new solo acoustic context

One silver lining of the pandemic is that many artists used some of their time in isolation to reflect on their art. Locked down in South Carolina, singer and guitarist Jesse Colin Young launched a YouTube video series called *One Song at a Time*—on each episode Young reimagined a single work from his expansive catalog, accompanying himself on a Taylor 910ce, recording himself on two AEA A440 ribbon mics—one for his voice, the other for his guitar—and no overdubs. The result is now an 11-track solo acoustic album filled with stripped-down versions of such hits as "Darkness, Darkness," from the Youngbloods' 1969 album *Elephant Mountain*, and the jazzy "Ridgetop," from his 1973 breakthrough solo effort, *Song for Juli*. The new album, the follow-up to 2016's comeback *Dreamers*, traces Young's personal journey from the Lower East Side of Manhattan to the San Francisco Bay Area to his home on a Hawaiian coffee plantation to the Deep South.

At 79, Young's once youthful voice shows signs of his age, but his lower-register ballads, like the 1960s country-blues song "Four in the Morning," written by his friend George Remaily, still ring true (Remaily's drug-inspired "Euphoria" is another highlight.) Young's chiming fingerstyle guitar shines on "Sugar Babe," based on an old folk song, and again on "Song for Juli," a sweet ode to his youngest child. But these reimagined songs, filled with so much warmth and love, transcend the road-weary travels of a folk troubadour to reveal the resiliency of the human spirit.

—Greg Cahill

Josh Kimbrough

Slither, Soar & Disappear

(Tompkins Square)

Guitarist returns to Appalachian roots

Despite titles like "Backyard Hawk" and "Squirrel in the Leaves," there's nothing pictorial about these guitar instrumentals, written by Josh Kimbrough on the back deck of his house in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. He's not trying to describe the world—he's responding while watching his newborn baby take a nap. According to an interview, he's using acoustic guitar to imagine himself as "part of the chorus of natural sounds," and faced with the way fatherhood "forces one to abandon parts of the self," he's slowing his pace of life, coming to grips with new responsibilities, and returning to Appalachian music for a brief respite in nature, solitude, and fingerstyle guitar.

These are richly intimate, deeply felt pieces that come together into one vibrant, multicolored song cycle. With "Morning Moon," Kimbrough channels his love for Fernando Sor and classical guitar, playing a methodical, patiently ascending melody on nylon strings, as cellist Leah Gibson bows a set of variations. On "Simon's Lullaby," he lays down a gently rolling rhythm, leaving the main themes to friends Bobby Britt (fiddle) and Rachel Kiel (flute). On "Booker Creek Ripple," Kimbrough, Wilson Greene (banjo), and Andrew Marlin (mandolin) pass a bubbling, bluesy melody back and forth, and on "Eyes on the Moon," Kimbrough turns a lulling arpeggio into a meditation on his place (and his son's place) in the world. Kimbrough hasn't quite become part of the chorus, but he's done the next best thing: transform nature's melodies into beautiful ones of his own.

—KB

The Soul of an Artist

Robbie Basho's Iconic Old 12-string

BY GLENN KIMPTON

Robbie Basho (see feature on page 22) mainly played a six-string Wyman guitar, but he is better known for his rich 12-string playing on an old ladder-braced instrument, probably made between 1890 and 1910 in Mexico, that is now in the hands of guitarist Steffen Basho-Junghans (no relation to Robbie). "The condition of the guitar is not very good," Basho-Junghans says. "But the sound is still amazing—really orchestral—which is probably why Basho had such a strong relationship with it."

In its current condition, the guitar is tricky to play, with a potentially large amount of work to be done before it can be forgiving to the player. The neck itself is straight, but slanted towards the body. "The whole problem actually began when Basho was winding on the steel strings, because the small Spanish base of the neck was not able to resist those forces over the years," Basho-Junghans explains. "In fact, the 12-string was not used on his last two albums, *Bouquet* and *Twilight Peaks*, which might indicate that the problems with it had already become quite massive."

Of course, acoustic instruments are susceptible to the effects of time, regardless of how well they are looked after, and guitarist Glenn Jones is adamant that Basho was very careful when traveling with his 12-string. "He would not gate-check it; rather he'd go out of his way to charm the airline personnel, telling them how unique and valuable it was, asking stewardesses to store it in their personal lockers whenever he flew with it. During his lifetime, that guitar was his soul, so to speak."

There also seems to be some confusion about the repairs that have been done to the guitar. While Basho-Junghans thinks that the instrument has had exactly the same top since 1965, Jones believes that when it began to collapse due to years of heavy use, Basho had a luthier replace it. "If you look at that 12-string on the cover of *The Falconer's Arm II* and then years later on the back cover of *Art of the Acoustic Steel String Guitar 6 & 12*, you can see the difference," Jones says. The mystery lives on. AG

COURTESY OF STEFFEN BASHO-JUNGHANS

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